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## Body and material substance in the 'Periphyseon' of John Scottus Eriugena

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**Body and Material Substance**  
**in the *Periphyseon* of John Scottus Eriugena**

**by**

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**PhD THESIS**

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# Body and Material Substance in the *Periphyseon* of John Scottus Eriugena

## An Abstract

It has been argued (by Richard Sorabji among others) that in the *Periphyseon* John Scottus Eriugena (?800 - ?877) presents an immaterialist theory of corporeal substance. I argue that as it stands this claim requires qualification. At points in the *Periphyseon* Eriugena's theory of body presupposes a material substrate. In Part One of this study I aim to show – by an analysis of Eriugena's definitions of form, substance, and matter – that the immaterialist and substrate theories, although *prima facie* inconsistent with one another, combine to form a single unified theory of body understood 'dialectically.'

In Part Two I argue that, by mapping the philosophical notions of *processio* and *reditus* onto the Christian doctrines of Fall and Resurrection, Eriugena develops a theory of body according to which diversity is illusory (punishment for sin), and the 'created' reality (man's pre-lapsarian state) is radical simplicity. The Fall is a fall into diversity, into effect; the Resurrection is a return to simplicity, to the Cause.

Eriugena has primarily been thought of, both by his contemporaries and modern commentators, as a metaphysician, a liberal arts master, a Neoplatonist. Without denying that he is all or any of these, it is the aim of this study to show that his masterpiece – and in particular his theory of body – serves a practical purpose: to bring fallen human nature back into alignment with God.

Through a radical de-historicizing of the doctrines of Fall and Resurrection, and a dialectical understanding of the relation that obtains between Creator and creation, Eriugena presents a theory of body and material substance that is at once wholly ascetic and profoundly optimistic.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

I	Sheldon-Williams I. P. (ed. and trans.), <i>Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon Liber Primus</i> (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae vol. VII, Dublin, 1968)
II	Sheldon-Williams I. P. (ed. and trans.), <i>Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon Liber Secundus</i> (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae vol. IX, Dublin, 1972)
III	Sheldon-Williams I. P. (ed. and trans.), <i>Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon Liber Tertius</i> (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae vol. XI, Dublin, 1981)
IV	Jeauneau, Edouard (ed.), O' Meara, J. J., Sheldon-Williams, I. P. (trans.) <i>Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon Liber Quartus</i> (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae vol. XIII, Dublin, 1995)
V	Jeauneau, Edouard (ed.) CCCM CLXV <i>Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon Liber Quintus</i> (Turnholti, 2003)
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina

# PART ONE

## Introduction

### i) Aims and Objectives:

In its final analysis, the *Periphyseon*<sup>1</sup> of John Scottus Eriugena is an extended meditation upon the relation between God and creation. It is the aim of this study to offer a detailed examination of the role of body and material substance within that relationship.

In Part One we shall attempt to demonstrate that Eriugena's various accounts of body and material substance can be taken to express a single coherent thesis. In Chapters One and Two we shall look at form and matter respectively. By the end of Part One it is hoped that we shall have a resilient model of Eriugenian body. Part Two shall then be taken up with an attempt to illustrate the role played by the body in the unfolding of Eriugena's broader metaphysics and theology. Chapter Three studies the role of body in the Fall; and Chapter Four ponders the death of the body, its resurrection and the return of human nature to God.

The problems under discussion in Part One are, in a sense, internal to Eriugena's metaphysical schema. The problems that shall form the focus of Part Two are, as it were, external to the theory itself: is it now possible to show that the account of body developed in Part One is consistent with the incontrovertible teaching of Holy Scripture?

In this sense the present study mirrors the form of the *Periphyseon* itself, being roughly divisible into two parts – the metaphysical groundwork occupies the lion's

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<sup>1</sup> For the title of the *Periphyseon*, see Sheldon-Williams, I. P., "The Title of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," *Studia Patristica*, 3 (Berlin, 1961) pp. 297-302



share of the opening sections; the later work consists in showing how the theory of body reached in Part One finds endorsement through scriptural exegesis.

## ii) The Problem:

Influenced by his freshly absorbed Greek sources, the relationship between God and creation is conceived by Eriugena in terms of a Procession from God and a Return to God.<sup>2</sup> So, for example, in the Preface to his translation of Maximus the Confessor's *Ambigua*, Eriugena claims that Maximus reveals

what sort of thing Procession is, namely a multiplication of the divine goodness through all the things that are, descending from the highest to the lowest, firstly from the general essence of all things, then through the most general genera, next through the more general genera, then the more specific species to the most specific species through differences and properties. And likewise, what sort of thing Reversion of the divine goodness is, namely a congregation, through the same stages from the infinite and multiplex variety of those things that are to the simplest unity of all things, which is in God and is God; so that God might be all things, and all things might be God.<sup>3</sup>

Even at this early stage in our investigation it is worth noting that the 'movement language' of procession and return, is translatable, according to Eriugena, into language that does not imply movement: multiplication and congregation. This 'static' rendering of classical Neoplatonic metaphysics will prove crucial to our analysis in Part Two of the Fall and Return as 'alignments' of the will and the intellectual, perceptive faculties rather than as historical processes.

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<sup>2</sup> See Jeaneau, E, "The Neoplatonic Themes of *Processio* and *Reditus* in Eriugena," *Dionysius* 15 (1991). For a clear and unequivocal expression of the view that the *Periphyseon* is an attempt to frame a new metaphysical structure for understanding the relation between God and man, see Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 68 and p. 282: "Eriugena's philosophy is a daring attempt to express in dialectical terms the meaning of the relations between human and divine nature."

<sup>3</sup> *Versio Ambiguorum Sancti Maximi* (PL 122 1195BC) my translation: *qualis sit processio, id est, multiplicatio divinae bonitatis per omnia, quae sunt, a summo usque deorsum, per generalem omnium essentiam primo, deinceps per genera generalissima, deinde per genera generaliora, inde per species specialiores usque ad species specialissimas per differentias proprietatesque descendens. Et iterum, eiusdem, divinae videlicet, bonitatis qualis sit reversio id est, congregatio per eosdem gradus ab infinita eorum, quae sunt, variaeque multiplicatione usque ad simplicissimam omnium unitatem, quae in Deo est et Deus est; ita ut et Deus omnia sit, et omnia Deus sint.*



Essential to an understanding of Eriugena's notion of the relationship between Creator and Creation is his theory of corporeal substance. After all, the material body, mutable, temporally bounded, either male or female, stands at the furthest reach from the changeless, eternal and perfectly simple Creator; it is therefore also the beginning of the ascent to God.

The division of substances, which took its beginning from God, and, descending by degrees, reached its end in the division of man into male and female, and again the reunification of the same substances ought to begin from man and ascend through the same degrees to God Himself, in whom... there is no division because in Him all things are one; so the unification of natures will begin from man, through the grace of the Saviour, in Whom, as the Apostle says, there is neither male nor female when human nature shall be restored to its pristine state.<sup>4</sup>

Descending a ladder it is the rung closest to the ground you reach last, but it is also the first step in the ascent. The ladder is Dialectic, the “mother of all the arts.”<sup>5</sup> There is a body of evidence to suggest that, in his own lifetime, Eriugena was thought of primarily as a liberal arts master.<sup>6</sup> And several modern commentators have adopted this view, arguing that the *Periphyseon* itself is, at least in its original conception, a treatise on dialectic or a guide to the use of dialectics in theological enquiry.<sup>7</sup> Over the

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<sup>4</sup> II 532AB (all references to the *Periphyseon* I, II, III, IV and V are according to the PL column classification. Except where stated, translations from the *Periphyseon* I, II, III are by I. P. Sheldon-Williams. Translations from *Periphyseon* IV and V are by J. J. O' Meara.)

<sup>5</sup> V 870B

<sup>6</sup> So for example Prudentius complains to Eriugena of *tui quadrivii innodationibus ac depravationibus* in his *De Praedestinatione contra Johannem Scotum* (PL 115 1020D). Florus Diaconus refers to Eriugena as *homo quasi scolasticus et eruditus* in his *Adv. Johannis Scottis Definitiones* and accuses him of *humanis et... philosophicis argumentationibus disputans, nulla ratione reddita, nulla Scripturarum sive sanctorum patrum auctoritate praelata, velut tenenda et sequenda sola sua praesumptione definire ausus est*. (PL 119 102B – 103A). Note that both these sources – Prudentius and Florus – are hostile to Eriugena in the predestination controversy.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of the view that the *Periphyseon* is primarily concerned with dialectic see, Ueberweg, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (London, 1875) p. 360 where Ueberweg claims that Eriugena hypostasizes the *tabula logica*. The same point is made by Sheldon-Williams, see Sheldon-Williams, “The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena,” *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967) p. 521. Sheldon-Williams claims that the original purpose of the *Periphyseon* was to show that the dialecticians' table of contraries and contradictories had a metaphysical counterpart. See also Sheldon-Williams's introduction to I p. 5. See also, Roques, “Remarques sur la Signification de Jean Scot Erigene” *Divinitas* XI (1967) p. 253; Huber, *Johannes Scotus Erigena: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie im Mittelalter* (repr. Hildesheim, 1960) pp.160, 163.



course of the following analysis it should become clear that, although the *Periphyseon* contains a dialectical account of God's relationship with creation, this does not mean that dialectics is the *subject* of the enquiry. Rather, it is *by means of* dialectics that Eriugena attempts to resolve the divisions he finds in universal nature, a resolution that ultimately aims to unify God and creation. Indeed, for Eriugena, the practice of philosophy (particularly dialectics) is itself an ascent to God.<sup>8</sup>

The nature of matter and corporeal substance within this dialectical relationship will prove of utmost importance for the working out of God's plan as conceived by Eriugena:

What should be more important, after God, for the reason to consider than unformed matter I do not see, when the questions it raises are: what is matter? What is form? What is made from matter and form? Whence (comes) matter? Is it to be included among the primordial causes which were created by God first of all, or even from the secondary causes which proceed from the primordials? Is it to be reckoned among the things which are subject to the sense or among those which are to be allotted to the intellect? And can it be defined when it is still infinite or is it definable even when it is finite? – which seems to conflict with reason, since it has been clearly established by the holy fathers that there are two, and two only, that cannot be defined, God and matter. For God is without limit and without form since He is formed by none, being the Form of all things (*forma omnium*). Similarly matter is without form and without limit, for it needs to be formed and limited from elsewhere, while in itself it is not form but something that can receive form. And this similarity between the Cause of all things, from which and in which and through which and for which all things exist, and this unformed cause – I mean matter – which was created to the end that those things which in themselves cannot be

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<sup>8</sup> In this respect Eriugena is closer to the late Neoplatonic commentators for whom the *telos* of philosophical enquiry is likeness to God, than to the Scholastics. See Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200 – 600AD* Vol. 1 Psychology (Duckworth, 2004) pp. 319-328.



grasped by the sense might by some means have a sensible appearance in it, is understood in contrary sense.<sup>9</sup>

Now that we have placed matter and corporeal substance squarely at the heart of Eriugena's metaphysical and theological scheme we need to expose the first core problem of this enquiry.

There are in the *Periphyseon* several definitions of corporeal substance or body; we might think of them as 'formulae', lists of ingredients that go to make up complex bodies. The commonest definition of body to be found in the *Periphyseon* is that expressed by

#### The Form + Matter Theory:

Every corporeal and sensible creature is composed of matter and form.<sup>10</sup>

And,

Qualitative form... combining with matter produces body.<sup>11</sup>

And,

That form which is a species of quality, when it is joined to matter, produces a body.<sup>12</sup>

As well as the Form + Matter Theory we also find body defined in terms of its constituent elements:

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<sup>9</sup> I 499C-500A; Calcidius calls God, matter and the ideas, the *summa genera* and calls them *primae substantiae* (in *Tim.*, 330). Eriugena cites Calcidius' commentary on the *Timaeus* in his glosses to Martianus. See Lutz, C. (ed.) *Annotationes ad Marcianum* (Cambridge Massachussetts, 1939) p. 10 [7, 10] and p. 22 [13,23]. For the debate over the attribution of the Martianus glosses to Eriugena see Michael Herren, "The Commentary on Martianus Attributed to John Scottus: Its Hiberno-Latin Background" in Allard, G.-H. (ed.) *Jean Scot Ecrivain* (Montreal: Institut d'Etudes Medievales, 1986) pp.269, 271-272, 274, 285. Schrimpf, "Zur Frage der Authentizitat unserer Texte von Johannes Scottus' *Annotationes in Martianum*," in J.J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (eds.) *The Mind of Eriugena*, (Dublin, 1973) pp. 125-39; Marenbon, John, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre* (Cambridge, 1981 ) pp.117-119; John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford, 1988) pp.25-26. For the availability of Calcidius in the ninth century see Edouard Jeuneau, "L'Heritage de la Philosophie Antique" in his *Etudes Erigeniennes* (Etudes Augustiniennes Paris, 1987) pp.39-40; Cappuyns, M., *Jean Scot Erigene, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Sa Pensee*, (Louvain-Paris, 1933) p.392 n.4; E. Mensching, "Zur Calcidius-ueberlieferung" in *Vigiliae Christianae* 19 1965 pp.42-56.

<sup>10</sup> II 548B: *omnis siquidem corporalis sensibilisque creatura ex materia et forma constitutur.*

<sup>11</sup> III 701D: *Qualitativa forma... adiuncta materiae corpus effecit.*

<sup>12</sup> I 495BC: *eam formam quae species qualitatis est materiae superadditam corpus cui οὐσίᾱ subsistit perficere.* See also I 494A; IV 786C: *corpore (hoc est ex formata materia sensibili).*



### The Elemental Theory:

All bodies...are composed from the coming together of the four simple elements, extending from the greatest to the smallest.<sup>13</sup>

And,

Body is a compound welded together of the qualities of the four elements under a single species.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the *Periphyseon* we also find body defined as an agglomeration of immaterial properties or qualities. This definition we shall refer to as

### The Immaterialist Theory:

Body, when the accidents are withdrawn, can by no means subsist by itself since it is not supported by any substance of its own. For if you withdraw quantity from body it will not be a body... similarly if you take quality away from it, what is left is shapeless and nothing. The same view must be taken of the other accidents by which the body is seen to be held together. So that which cannot subsist by itself without accidents must be understood to be nothing else but the concourse of those same accidents.<sup>15</sup>

That the three formulae are in tension with one another (if not actually logically inconsistent) should be clear from the outset. The most obvious divergence between the three is the space each formula makes for matter. In the first formula matter is clearly a crucial constituent in the composition of body; it seems to act as a substrate for the inhering of the forms. In the Elemental Theory we can still assume a role for matter, after all the elements themselves are presumably material in some

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<sup>13</sup> III 701A: *omnium corporum ex quattuor simplicium elementorum coitu compositorum ex maximis usque ad minima*. For the elements in the *Periphyseon* see, I 479AB; I 492B; II 605C – 606A; III 663B; III 664A; III 695BC; III 701A; III 711D – 713B; IV 775B; IV 783AB; IV 801D; IV 858A; V 874A; V 896CD; V 902AB; V 958CD.

<sup>14</sup> I 474B: *corpus est compositio quaedam quattuor elementorum qualitibus sub una quadam specie conglobata*. The stress on qualities in this definition points towards the Immaterialist Theory. See also I 479A: *corpora quae ex coitu quattuor mundi elementorum conficiuntur*. For a clear and helpful account of the elements' relation to matter and body in Eriugena, see Dermot Moran, "Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*. An Examination of Eriugena's Understanding of the Physical World," O' Rourke (ed.) *At the Heart of the Real. Philosophical Essays in Honour of the Most Reverend Desmond Connell Archbishop of Dublin* (Irish Academic Press, 1992) pp. 67-96, esp. pp. 78-82.

<sup>15</sup> I 503B: *Corpus autem subtractis addidentibus nullo modo per se subsistere potest quoniam nulla sui substantia fulcitur. Nam si quantitatem a corpore subtraxeris corpus non erit...Similiter si qualitatem ab eo dempseris deforme remanebit et nihil. Eadem ratio in caeteris accidentibus quibus corpus contineri videtur contemplanda est. Quod igitur sine accidentibus per se non potest subsistere nihil aliud intelligendum est praeter eorundum accidentium concursum esse*.



fundamental way. But in the last formula there is no mention of matter at all either directly, or indirectly as in the case of the Elemental Theory. Indeed matter would appear *prima facie* to be excluded by the Immaterialist Theory: body, according to this theory, is no more than a concourse of accidents that in themselves appear to be immaterial Aristotelian categories: Quantity, Quality and so on.

In view of these apparently conflicting theories, the majority of interpreters of Eriugena have concluded that he is confused on the subject of material substance. It is our aim over the course of the following two chapters to show that what we have presented here as essentially a textual problem, a problem of consistency across the *Periphyseon* as a whole, is not so much a confusion on Eriugena's part, as a deliberate attempt to express a fundamental tenet of his metaphysical theology: the dialectical nature of the relation between God and creation.

## Chapter One : Form

### Introduction:

Aside from passing references throughout the whole of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena gives detailed accounts of form and its relation to body in two places, firstly in Book One as part of his general discussion of the application of the categories to God (I 462D – 524B), and secondly, in Book Three as part of his hexaemeral investigation. According to Eriugena the division of light from darkness on the First Day of creation is provisionally offered as a reference to the division of form and matter:

The name of light is taken for the perfection of form, but that of darkness for the confusion of formlessness.<sup>1</sup>

It is these two sections of the *Periphyseon* to which we shall largely be referring over the following pages. It shall be found that there are a number of textual and terminological anomalies within the *Periphyseon* that appear to point to metaphysical confusions concerning form and its relation to material substance. Our primary objective in this chapter will be to show that, once we have taken into account variations in terminology and usage, it is possible to show that Eriugena actually presents a single, unified theory of form and its relation to body.<sup>2</sup>

To this end we shall first uncover some of the central difficulties that are raised by a close reading of Eriugena's account of form and its relation to material substance and then show how the difficulties are, in effect, superficial once placed within the dialectical structure of the *Periphyseon* conceived as a 'system'.

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<sup>1</sup> III 691CD; the interpretation is Augustinian, as Eriugena himself acknowledges, classing himself as amongst those *Augustinum sequentes*. See *De Civ. Dei* xi.23; *De Gen. ad litt.* I.17.34; iv. 22.39.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Gersh suggests that Eriugena's variations in terminology, "the polysemy of etymology and metaphor, exhibit not intellectual weaknesses but intellectual strengths." Gersh, Stephen, "John Scottus Eriugena and Anselm of Canterbury" in Marenbon (ed.) *Medieval Philosophy* (Routledge, 2003) p. 125.



## I : Two Forms

To complicate matters from the start, Eriugena distinguishes two ‘types’ of form,<sup>3</sup> two species, each of a different genus, namely, forms of quality (*forma qualitiva*)<sup>4</sup> and forms of substance (*substantialis forma*)<sup>5</sup> or *ousia*. The former are ineluctably bound to the material flux – Qualitative Form (QF), the latter is form acting as the immutable ground of the body – Substantial Form (SF). Both QF and SF, Eriugena argues, are necessary constituents of a sensible body.

### A) Qualitative Form:

QF is, according to Eriugena, immaterial in itself,<sup>6</sup> but is “joined to matter so as to constitute body.”<sup>7</sup> It is “always varying and changeable,”<sup>8</sup> and it is, “dispersed among diverse differences by accident.”<sup>9</sup> It is signified in the Biblical text by the waters which are under heaven and which are in turmoil (*exaestuant*) and which cover over that inward substance (*intima substantia*). These waters wash around the SF and render it almost imperceptible as to what it is. When the Bible tells us that ‘Heaven and Earth shall pass away’ (Marc.13:31) the reference is to matter and QF, not the SF.

That QF is a necessary component of body has been discussed earlier by Eriugena in Book I where he has the Alumnus state that QF is, “a species of quality that, when it is joined to matter, produces a body, of which the substance is οὐσία.”<sup>10</sup>

And again that when whatever form from quality is superadded to the material

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<sup>3</sup> I 496B: *duas species diversi generis, ousiae videlicet atque qualitatibus*.

<sup>4</sup> III 701D

<sup>5</sup> III 702A

<sup>6</sup> I 496D: *quantitates qualitatesque quantum in se ipsis cogitantur incorporeas esse*. Note the *quantum* (insofar as) qualification. The dependence of QFs on point of view will prove vital later in making a case for the appearance of material substance depending on the alignment of the will and the epistemic faculty.

<sup>7</sup> III 703B

<sup>8</sup> III 703B

<sup>9</sup> III 703B: *secundum accidens*.

<sup>10</sup> I 495B

substrate then the complete body is made.<sup>11</sup> In essence the QF is a necessary suchness, without which a body is either a) cognitively unavailable, or b) is not a body.

Disentangling a) and b) shall occupy the second half of Chapter Two when we come to discuss visibility and its relation to material substance.

Leaving aside for now the question as to *how* it is that QFs make their sensible appearance in matter, we can at least assert *that* for Eriugena QF is an attribute of body and is to be found always in association with bodies.<sup>12</sup> In other words QFs are not to be found except in relation to bodies. To what extent, therefore, are QFs simply bodily components of the perfected body? On what basis is Eriugena able to maintain the view that QFs are immaterial, incorporeal in themselves and are superadded to a material substrate?

#### i) Are QFs ‘Bodily’?

As well as the passages in which Eriugena expresses the view that QFs are superimposed on matter in order for bodies to come to be, there are points at which he seems to suggest that QFs are themselves quasi-corporeal:

Everything that exists is either a body, or bodiless, or something between the two which is called “corporal.”<sup>13</sup>

To which of these three modes of corporeality and incorporeality do QFs belong? A body is, according to Eriugena, “that which is extended in length, breadth and depth;”<sup>14</sup> it may be a physical object or a geometrical figure. Of course it is perfectly possible for a component of body to be itself a body. Nor on the face of it is it impossible for the body to comprise non-bodily elements. So it cannot be ruled out *a*

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<sup>11</sup> I 495D: *materiam corporum fieri, cui adiecta qualicunque ex qualitate forma perfecta corpus efficitur.*

<sup>12</sup> V 882C: *semper corporibus adhaerent.*

<sup>13</sup> V 882C: *omne enim, quod est, aut corpus est, aut incorpoream, aut medium, quod corporale dicitur.*

<sup>14</sup> V 882C



*priori* that QF is not itself bodily. If the accidents that compose body (QFs) are material then we can dismiss the possibility of Eriugena expressing an Immaterialist Theory of body. An example of that which is bodiless is life when isolated from matter. The corporal, Eriugena suggests, are such things as colour, shape and so on. And it is precisely these qualities that Eriugena has argued are, when considered in relation to bodies, QFs:

The order and position of their [sc. natural bodies'] natural parts or members are assigned to quality and are properly called form.<sup>15</sup>

And he continues in an expansion:

... Hence those are called deformed who do not possess a suitable harmony of their members or are deprived of the beauty of colour, which is produced in bodies from the fiery quality which is calor.

But problems arise when QFs are taken to be 'corporal.' Compare the above account of QF with the passage from Book V in which colour and shape are described as corporal. In Books I and III bodies are decked (*superfusae*)<sup>16</sup> with colours which as forms are wholly distinct from bodies. So Eriugena quotes Gregory of Nyssa with approval:

For softness, and two-cubit length, and the other things that have been mentioned [viz colour, weight, feel to the touch] are not, from the point of view of reason, confused with one another or with body.<sup>17</sup>

Colour, Gregory goes on to assert, is solely intelligible. And Eriugena, in his own words, emphatically endorses this view:

Quantities and qualities, in so far as they are contemplated in themselves, are incorporeal.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I 494CD

<sup>16</sup> III 710B

<sup>17</sup> I 502C quoting Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* 24 (PG44 213A)

<sup>18</sup> I 496D (quoted in n.6 above); Cf. IV 775B: *quantitates similiter et qualitates intelligibilis naturae esse nulli sapienti dubium videtur.*

So are the QFs inhering body corporal or incorporeal? *Prima facie* the QFs appear to be straightforward universals. Surely it cannot be the case that these universals are also somehow bodily, or corporal?

An answer to this question can be formulated by observing that in the discussion of QF in Book III Eriugena suggests that, “matter and the form attached to it (QF) can be combined under a single meaning (*unus intellectus est*) since they produce a single body.”<sup>19</sup> And in the passage quoted above the QFs are described as not confused with one another or with body, “from the point of view of reason.”<sup>20</sup> It seems, on the basis of these two statements, that whether or not we wish afford QF ‘corporality’ or incorporeality will depend on whether or not we wish to discuss the form abstracted from the body of which it is a constituent (from the point of view of reason), or in relation to that body. In relation to body, combined under a single meaning, it is corporal; abstracted from the body by reason it is incorporeal.

Even at this early stage in our survey it is possible to see how – by means of this emphasis on point-of-view – the metaphysics of material substance will be made to depend on epistemology and the alignment of the will: what body is will depend ultimately on what value we believe it has.

## B) Substance and Substantial Form:

Eriugena’s notion of substance and substantial form (SF) is familiar inasmuch as a good deal of his thinking derives from Aristotle via Porphyry and Boethius and

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<sup>19</sup> III 702B

<sup>20</sup> I 502C



Martianus Capella.<sup>21</sup> There are, in Eriugena, however, a number of unprecedented twists. These twists and ambiguities have led some scholars to suppose that Eriugena's theory of substance and SF is hopelessly confused.<sup>22</sup> It is the aim of what follows to show that, in fact, the twists and ambiguities do not represent a failure on Eriugena's part to assimilate his sources properly, as has been suggested, rather the apparent oddities concerning SF are deliberate and *productive*, illustrating Eriugena's dialectical understanding of the relation between Creator and creation. Ultimately our dialectical reflection on substance and SF is the means whereby the Return of all things to God is to be effected.

The first thing to ensure is that the language *we* use to analyse Eriugena's theory is itself free from ambiguity. Eriugena tends to use the same words to refer to genus and species. As shall become apparent, this is not entirely, or not just, a stylistic device, or the result of an inconsistent terminology; there are underlying metaphysical reasons for the identical terminology. We on the other hand need to be clear as to exactly what Eriugena means us to understand by *ousia*, substance, essence and so on in each instance.

To this end it is necessary to identify three stages, three differing uses of the term *ousia* or substance. Firstly, there is that substance that corresponds to the first of

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<sup>21</sup> For Eriuegna's inheritance of the categorial tradition, see Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'" reprinted in Marenbon, *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism, and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West* (Variorum, 2000) V pp. 117-134. For Eriugena's sources in general see, Sheldon-Williams, I. P., "Eriugena's Greek Sources" in O' Meara, J. J. and Bieler, L. (eds.) *The Mind of Eriugena* (Dublin, 1973) pp. 1-15; Madec, G., "Jean Scot et ses auteurs," Allard, G.-H (ed.) *Jean Scot ecrivain* (Montreal: Institut d' Etudes Medievales, 1986) pp. 143-86; Jeauneau, E., "Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor in the Works of John Scottus Eriugena," Blumenthal (ed.) *Carolingian Essays* (Washington, 1983) pp. 175-187.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Marenbon, *op. cit.*, p. V 124: "Is this many-sidedness of meaning the product of a sophisticated philosophical system, which sets out – among other things – to solve the difficulties surrounding the concept of *ousia*? Or is it merely the result of John's failure fully to assimilate the diverse arguments of his sources?" Marenbon's answer falls squarely to the latter view; elsewhere Marenbon concludes that Eriugena's various uses of *ousia*, "do not themselves link to form a coherent logical picture." Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre* (Cambridge, 1981) p.87.



the categories, understood not in the Aristotelian sense as that which can neither said of a subject, nor in a subject, but as the genus in which all substantial species participate. Let us call this, generic substance. Then there are the substantial species of generic substance; these are classes of things such as Man or Horse. Let us call these specific substances, and deriving from them are individual substances such as Cicero and Bucephalus and so on. These individual substances are the subjects of the QFs that invest them. To recapitulate, the species of generic substance, are not substantial bodies, but specific substances: Man, Horse and so on. The individual substance belongs within the Aristotelian tradition that defines *ousia* as that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject; in other words it is the individual man, the individual horse.<sup>23</sup>

So far so Porphyrian. The Eriugenian twist comes, however, with the claim that there is no difference (or no substantial difference) between an individual substance and a specific substance; Cicero just is Man, Bucephalus just is Horse. This claim, far from being extraordinary or absurd, is actually trivial, even tautological, when understood in the context of Eriugena's metaphysics of substance.

The substantial form (SF) is, for Eriugena, a unifying principle. It is that in virtue of which Cicero and Socrates *qua* individual substances are identical with the specific substance in which they both participate, Man. And to this extent the SF is identical to the specific substance from which they derive. 'Man' is an example of a SF, and yet it, as a SF, is not greater in the infinite multiplication of human nature into its indivisible species than it is in the single first man, nor is it less in him than it is in

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<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Cat.* 2a 11-14; cf. *Categoriae Decem*, Minio-Paluello (ed.), *Aristoteles Latinus* I, 57 p. 146: *est igitur usia proprie et principaliter dicta quae neque in subiecto est neque de subiecto significatur, ut est hic homo vel hic equus.*



the whole of human nature; it admits of no variation or dissimilarity. But Eriugena wants to say that both Cicero and Socrates despite being substantially identical still have individual SFs.

There will always remain without change, like a centre, the natural essence which is proper to each individual, which can neither move nor increase nor diminish.<sup>24</sup>

SF, therefore, is ambiguous between individual substance and specific substance because individual substance and specific substance are identical. This is not strictly an ambiguity at all, but a reflection of the true substantial nature of things. The apparent ambiguity is deliberate on Eriugena's part; it is a function of his view that

the genus... is whole in each of its forms, just as also the several forms are one in their genus.<sup>25</sup>

Eriugena's notion of SF is, therefore, a crucial element in his overall metaphysical theology. SF will be identified, over the course of the *Periphyseon*, with human nature in its pristine pre-lapsarian state, with Paradise, with the interior body, and with the resurrection body. It acts as the compass by means of which the individual can negotiate its alignment with the Creator. The SF of a body is its relation (an identity relation) with its cause (specific substance, and ultimately generic substance). To talk of an individual's SF is to refer to its substantial relation to its cause.

Let us settle on this productively ambiguous definition of SF; it can be finessed in the light of the ensuing discussion. But the ambiguity, being essential to the notion of SF, cannot be eradicated. It must always be born in mind that the reference of 'SF' can range over individual substance, specific substance and ultimately even generic substance.

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<sup>24</sup> I 476A

<sup>25</sup> I 494B

Since it is the aim of this chapter to develop a model of how form relates to body and material substance, let us now turn to an examination of SF and its relation to body.

i) SF and the Body:

Eriugena has argued that a body is definable in terms of its matter and QF. The SF is superfluous in any such definition.

Nutritor:	Do you think that it is the essential form (SF) which, in combination with matter, produces natural body?
Alumnus:	Certainly not. Rather I see that it is what you do not mean. <sup>26</sup>

So again, what role for the SF? Eriugena is explicit in his claim that there can be no body without SF. The argument runs as follows:

- 1) No matter without form (QF) produces a body.
- 2) No form (QF) subsists without an individual substance as its subject.
- 3) No individual substance lacks a SF.
- 4) No form (SF) subsists without (*expers*) its Cause,<sup>27</sup> therefore,
- 5) A body, in order to be a body, requires matter, QF, SF and Cause.

The above argument makes clear the necessity of the presence of a SF in any given body, but it provides no substantial detail as to the precise role substance plays in constituting body. What Eriugena means by the *cause* of a SF also requires investigation. This investigation shall be saved for a later section of this chapter; the present concern is the SF itself, as opposed to its cause.

In Book One of the *Periphyseon* the Nutritor lists three things we ought to know distinctly: what we are, what is ours, and what is about us.<sup>28</sup> We are our

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<sup>26</sup> I 495B

<sup>27</sup> III 728B

<sup>28</sup> I 497C



substance which is endowed with life and intellect. Ours is the body. And about us are the sensibles, composed of the four elements. This triad reflects a distinction Eriugena detects in the *Categories*, a distinction according to which we can take *Ousia* to be the subject of which the other nine categories are accidents,<sup>29</sup> and that these accidents in turn can be divided into ‘internal’ and ‘external’.

Some of the Categories are predicated around οὐσίᾳ, which are said to be a kind of περιτοχάι, that is ‘circumstances’, because they are seen to be about it, while some, which are called by the Greeks συμβάματα, that is ‘accidents’, are within it.<sup>30</sup>

If we are justified in indexing this categorial distinction to the what-is-it, what-does-it-have, and what-is-about-it questions then body seems to correspond to the inherent accidents: quality, relation, condition, action and passion; it is something a substance *has*. Substance is distinct from body. And indeed Eriugena is able to deploy several arguments, “against those who say that their mortal transient bodies are nothing else than their οὐσίᾳ, and that their οὐσίᾳ is nothing else but their body, which is material and composed of different parts, namely, of form and matter.”<sup>31</sup> So once again, why discuss SF in relation to body at all? While an analysis of body will require only a list of the relevant QFs, there remains the question as to whether or not this particular body *exists*. In order for a body to exist it must have a SF. Eriugena makes this clear by comparing a sensible body with a geometrical figure. A

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<sup>29</sup> See for e.g. II 593A: *aliud est substantia aliud accidens substantiae*. Cf. *Categoriae Decem*, Minio-Paluello (ed.), *Aristoteles Latinus* I, 51, p. 144: *Hae sunt categoriae decem, quarum prima usia est – scilicet quae novem ceteras sustinet – reliquae vero novem συμβεβήκοτα (id est accidentia) sunt*. At I 497A Eriugena defines quality and quantity as *prima accidentia maximeque* of *ousia*.

<sup>30</sup> I 471C. Further to our analysis of QFs, it appears reasonable on the basis of this passage to equate or identify these συμβάματα understood in substance, with the ‘corporal’ qualities that fall between body and the bodiless but which are always and only associated with bodies, namely colour and shape and so on. At V 933D Eriugena lists those things that are described as being, *in subiecto quodam intelliguntur*. These turn out to be, *naturalia accidentia: qualitates et quantitates, ceteraque, quae augeri ac minui possunt*.

<sup>31</sup> I 490CD.



geometrical body or figure, he states, “consists only of the quantity of its dimensions and lines and quality of its form.”<sup>32</sup> Geometrical bodies are contemplated by the mind alone since they do not subsist in *ousia*.<sup>33</sup> In other words it lacks *substance*. Natural (or sensible) bodies on the other hand,

are natural for the very reason that they subsist in their natural οὐσίαι, that is, their essences, and cannot exist without them.<sup>34</sup>

These sensible bodies receive the cause of their establishment<sup>35</sup> from no other source than its substance, or SF. It is the necessary cause of a sensible (as opposed to geometrical) body inasmuch as the sensible body cannot be without it.

When we come to analyse Eriugena’s position further, however, we find that substance or *ousia* cannot be the cause of bodies. In fact Eriugena is careful to argue that bodies are not caused by their *ousiai*, rather their *ousia* is a necessary precondition of their establishment in reality. In other words, ‘substance’ is here being used as ‘being’.

Note that Eriugena did not say that *ousia* is the cause of the body’s constitution, rather he claimed that the body received the cause of its establishment from *ousia*. The direct cause of the body is the running together (*concursum*) of the accidents in *ousia* which, by coming together create something sensible and extended in space; furthermore, the accidental forms (QFs) cannot be caused by substance since,

although the quality is contained within the substance – for no quality subsists through itself –, yet I would not say that the substance is the cause of the quality because every species follows its own genus since it is born of its genus and is immutably preserved within it; and therefore every substance flows down from general being (*ex generali essentia*), but every quality from general quality.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I 495C

<sup>33</sup> I 493D: *in nullaque οὐσία subsistunt*.

<sup>34</sup> I 493D

<sup>35</sup> I 497A: *constitutionis suae causam*.

<sup>36</sup> II 605AB

In this passage Eriugena refers to every substance flowing down *ex generali essentia*. In terms of the three stage model of substance we developed earlier, this *generali essentia* we labelled generic substance; and ‘every substance’ presumably refers both to specific substances (e.g. Man, Horse etc) and to individual substances (e.g. Cicero and Bucephalus). The SF of Cicero and Socrates is that which identifies them not as men *qua* individuals but as Man, their specific substance, that substance which they both share and which is wholly, immutably, eternally instantiated in them.

It is also the case that the SF of a body is the cause of a body inasmuch as without it the body cannot be said really to be. (To this extent a geometrical or imaginary body is not real, or is only real in an attenuated sense since it lacks substance.)

As we stated in the Introduction to this chapter both QF and SF are offered by Eriugena as necessary conditions of material body, and together, we may assume, they constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions of body firstly, to be, and secondly, to be the sort of thing it is. The above analysis of both QF and SF has shown both forms playing very different roles in Eriugena’s overall conception of the corporeal; QF, we might say, is a necessary condition of body instantiating certain universal qualities; SF is a necessary condition of body *qua* existent. In other words SF accounts for a thing’s being, QF for a thing’s being a such and such.

## ii) Body: Two Descriptions:

With the above definitions of QF and SF in place let us recapitulate by submitting two descriptions of body (in both cases, human bodies) to close scrutiny.



In the following passages we should be able to detect both QF and SF being used to explain how it is *that* individual bodies exist, and also to explain the differences by means of which they are individuated.

1. For the dissimilarity of men one from another in feature, size, and quality of their several bodies, and the variety of custom and conduct result not from human nature, which is one and same in all in whom it exists, and is always most like itself and admits no variety, but from the things which are understood about it, namely from places and times, from generation, from the quantity and quality of their diets, their habitats, the conditions under which each is born, and, to speak generally, from all things which are understood about the substance and not the substance itself (*circa substantiam intelliguntur et non ipsa substantia sunt*).<sup>37</sup>

The first point that requires our attention in this passage must be Eriugena's identification of 'nature' with substance, for I take it that "human nature" in the third line of the quote is an *example of* a "substance" mentioned in the last line. This must be specific substance. To talk of "human nature" is to *specify* a substance or SF; to talk of Substance in itself is to talk *generally*: generic substance. Why does he not say, therefore, 'human substance'? In Book V Eriugena explains that, "the Greeks very frequently put φύσις for οὐσία and οὐσία for φύσις."<sup>38</sup> And he goes on to define the proper use of these words. *Ousia*, he claims, should be translated 'essentia' and should be understood to mean that "which in every creature, visible and invisible, can neither be corrupted nor increased nor diminished."<sup>39</sup> The definition of *ousia* as that which in every creature cannot be corrupted, increased or diminished correlates with "human nature" defined in the passage from Book III as being one and same in all in whom it exists, and always most like itself and admitting of no variety.<sup>40</sup> Nature and essence are, according to Eriugena, synonymous in both Greek and Latin.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> III 703BC

<sup>38</sup> V 867A

<sup>39</sup> V 867A

<sup>40</sup> III 703BC

<sup>41</sup> V 867B: *essentia pro natura et natura pro essentia indifferenter constituitur, salva tamen singularum significationum proprietate.*



In passage 1, “human nature” is the specific substance of all men; it is “one and the same in all in whom it exists” just as the genus is whole in each of its species.<sup>42</sup> And this nature has as its origin that Substance, or the Substance itself (*ipsa substantia*): generic substance.

Substance or nature is the origin of all the SFs,<sup>43</sup> while those differences, namely differences according to place, time, quantity, quality, habitat and so on, account for dissimilarities between individual men, and are understood *about* specific substance (*circa substantiam*.) These differences are clearly categorial differences, differences deriving from the Aristotelian categories. And the categories, Eriugena claims, are accidents of *Ousia*, or generic substance.<sup>44</sup> And these categories Eriugena has divided into external and internal, or circumstances and accidents proper. In the passage under discussion Eriugena is discussing those factors that are understood *about* a subject which account for the dissimilarity to be perceived amongst individuals, and which allow for individuation.<sup>45</sup>

Let us take the above analysis of Eriugenian form in relation to body as an accurate rendering of Eriugena’s intentions. Now it is possible to turn to a second description of body.

2. Since God in that first and one man whom he made in his image established all men at the same time, yet did not bring them all at the same time into this visible world, but brings the nature (*naturam*) which he considers all at one time into visible essence at certain times and places according to a certain sequence which he himself knows: those who already <are becoming, or> have become visibly manifest in the world are said to be, while those which are as yet hidden, though destined to be, are said not to be.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> I 494B

<sup>43</sup> I 497B: *οὐσίαν, quae est formarum substantialium origo*.

<sup>44</sup> I 497A

<sup>45</sup> For individuation in Eriugena see Chapter Two, Section IV, i) below.

<sup>46</sup> I 445A



Though form is not mentioned explicitly in this early programmatic passage, certain phrases and concepts can be taken as referring to distinctions that later in the *Periphyseon* will be assigned ‘formal’ definitions. Thus that nature of the first and one man, “in whom all men are established” and which God contemplates all at one time, is identical to that human nature which is not less in that “unique and first man” out of whom all men are multiplied.<sup>47</sup> And this nature we have labelled specific substance. Thus the first man is here being discussed in terms of specific substance. And that visible essence into which the nature or specific substance is brought by God according to a pre-known sequence is the individual substance of an individual creature in which the QFs break forth in order to render manifest the natural body. But are individual substances visible? In themselves they are not, but since Eriugena is here talking of individual men coming into being, it cannot be the case that they *qua* corporeal men, come into *being* without being visible.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, it appears that, despite variations in language and context, Eriugena seems to deploy a single, coherent – though complex – notion of form in relation to body.

The aim of this chapter was to render consistent two formulae for body: firstly, that body is composed of matter and form (both QF and SF), and secondly, that it is composed of substance and accidents. How, if at all, can these positions be reconciled consistently? An answer to this question will clearly have to address the nature of the relationship between SF and Substance on the one hand and between QF and the categories on the other.

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<sup>47</sup> III 703A

<sup>48</sup> I 479A: *corpora vero si sensibus non percipantur corpora non sunt.*

## II : Substance and Accident

In Book V of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena defines Substance or *Ousia* as,

that which in every creature, visible and invisible, can neither be corrupted nor increased nor diminished.<sup>49</sup>

That which suffers no corruption, increase or diminishing must be immutable and eternal. And a few lines later Eriugena goes on to claim that, “every creature that subsists in its “reasons” is an οὐσία.”<sup>50</sup> But *Ousia* is also, “that by participation in which every indivisible species is formed.”<sup>51</sup> Is this not a simple mistake on Eriugena’s part, a confusion? Has he not assigned to the term ‘substance’ two metaphysically distinct meanings? On the contrary, over the next few pages I shall argue that the relation between Substance and SF is a relation of participation, and that far from being confused, this is another example of the productive ambiguity lying at the heart of Eriugena’s notion of substance and SF.

An individual substance is distinct from specific and generic substance inasmuch as it proceeds from specific and generic substance, but it is unified with specific and generic substance inasmuch as it continues to subsist within them, its causes direct and indirect. It is not the case, therefore, that Eriugena assigns to substance two meanings. Rather, one and the same thing is being referred to; in talking of substance we are talking *either* generally, *or* specifically *or* picking out an individual’s essence.

Οὐσία is in no way defined as to what it is... but only that it is; and this could aptly be said of all οὐσία universally, the most general, the most special, and the intermediate kinds.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> V 867A: *quod nec corrumpi, nec augeri, nec minui in omni creatura sive visibili sive intelligibili potest.*

<sup>50</sup> V 867AB; V 887A

<sup>51</sup> III 703A

<sup>52</sup> I 487B



Bodies subsist in their *ousiai* and cannot exist without them. Nor indeed can these individual *ousiai* exist without body.<sup>53</sup> But Eriugena also thinks of the categories themselves as accidents inhering Substance, or *Ousia*.

For they cannot subsist by themselves. Essence appears to be in all, for without it they are not able to be.”<sup>54</sup>

And Eriugena is not here talking about bodies, but the categories by means of which bodies are defined or sorted. Not only is it the case, therefore, that sensible bodies require a SF in order for them to come into being, so also the ‘accidental’ categories require the first category, Substance or *Ousia* in order for them to subsist, since they cannot subsist except in Substance.

Eriugena expresses the relation that obtains between substance and accident in an exegetical passage from Book III:

When the waters recede and are collected from all sides into their beds the shores begin to appear far and wide, bare and dry and solid, so when the inconstancy of perishable things is separated by the mind’s observation (*mentis contuitu*) from the imperishable natures in uninterrupted contemplation, soon the immutable and most beautiful firmness of the [substantial] forms and species will become manifest in their genera to the mind’s gaze (*animi obtutibus*).<sup>55</sup>

The first thing to note here is the evaluative implication of the metaphysics. The correct objects of intellection are the most beautiful and constant substantial forms. The differently weighted values are assigned to accidental qualities on the one hand (negative), and the substances on the other (positive). Through the notion of SF and its relation to specific substance and thereby to generic substance itself, Eriugena illustrates the correct alignment of the will. This alignment is expressed in

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<sup>53</sup> I 487A: *οὐσίαν per se ipsam diffinire et dicere quid sit nemo potest; ex his autem quae inseparabiliter ei adhaerent et sine quibus esse non potest.*

<sup>54</sup> I 467D

<sup>55</sup> III 702C; square brackets in Sheldon-William’s text indicate additions to the MS, R (Reims 875) taken by some to be in Eriugena’s own hand. See Sheldon-Williams’s introduction to I pp. 7-8.



*contemplatio* of the substances of things. Contemplation and its role in aligning the human will is discussed in Part Two.

But also of interest in this passage is the opening up of an apparent gap between the positions of the Alumnus and the Nutritor. In the passage the Nutritor claims that SFs are the imperishable natures that subsist as the ground of each and every creature and to which the inconstant and perishable QFs adhere. In Book I, however, the Alumnus states that, “That form which is a species of quality, when it is joined to matter, produces a body, of which the substance is οὐσία.”<sup>56</sup> This substance must be the specific substance, that in virtue of which Cicero is a man, and Bucephalus is a horse and so on. But this seems to conflict both with Nutritor’s claim that it is not generic or specific substance but the *form* of generic or specific substance that is, “an immovable foundation [that] supports and contains the formed matter.”<sup>57</sup> For the Alumnus, therefore, it is substance rather than its form (SF) that is given as the substantial ground around which the forms of the qualities (QFs) unite so as to constitute a natural body. Does this represent a genuine disagreement between the Nutritor and the Alumnus? The Nutritor defines the relationship between SF and *ousia* in the following passage:

Of the forms, some are understood in οὐσία, others in quality; but those which are in οὐσία are the substantial species of the genus. For of them genus is predicated because it subsists in them. For the genus, as we have often said, is whole in each of its forms, just as also the several forms are one in their genus; and all these, that is genera and forms, flow from the single source of οὐσία and by a natural circulation return to it again.<sup>58</sup>

The forms that are understood in *Ousia* are specific substances – Man, Horse and so on. We are justified, according to Eriugena, in predicating genus of them since it, that is the genus or *Ousia*, subsists in them. I take this to mean that we are justified in

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<sup>56</sup> I 495B

<sup>57</sup> III 701A

<sup>58</sup> I 494AB; II 526A.



predicating *Ousia* of them since *Ousia* subsists in them as their causal ground. And it is axiomatic for Eriugena that, “every caused thing always subsists in its cause.”<sup>59</sup> On this basis Eriugena argues that

one and the same thing is made known by the investigations of the contemplation in one way in its causes, in another way in its effects.<sup>60</sup>

And further to this, Holy Scripture, Eriugena claims, often uses words that signify corporeal things or material effects to refer to invisible and spiritual things, immaterial causes.<sup>61</sup> So the division of *Ousia* into its specific substances is effected by the reason alone (*sola ratione*)<sup>62</sup> while in reality it

remains indivisible by virtue of its nature and cannot be separated by any visible act or operation. For it subsists in its subdivisions eternally and immutably as a whole that is always together, and all its subdivisions are always together as an inseparable unity in it.<sup>63</sup>

It is possible now to see how it might be that the Alumnus is not actually contradicting his master in asserting that *Ousia* is the substantial ground of all things, rather than SF. The Alumnus is simply referring to the *same thing*, contemplated in its cause or genus, rather than in its effects or species.

This is a radical claim in that it aims to unify both the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions to which Eriugena is heir.<sup>64</sup> It is also radical in that this notion of one and the same thing being available to the understanding both as simple genus and

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<sup>59</sup> III 639C; see also II 547A; II 552A; II 605AB

<sup>60</sup> III 704B

<sup>61</sup> III 706A; IV 859C; V 888A; and cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* (PG3 1033AB).

<sup>62</sup> I 492C

<sup>63</sup> I 492C; IV 860C

<sup>64</sup> The harmony of Plato and Aristotle is an underlying theme in the Neoplatonist tradition from Porphyry onwards. See Porphyry in *Cat.* 57, 7-8; 58, 5-7; 91, 19 for a Platonist’s defence (against his own master, Plotinus) of the use of Aristotelian categories. Porphyry claims that the Categories apply only to words insofar as they signify things, not things in themselves. And words signify only things in the sensible (as opposed to intelligible) world (*in Cat.* 91, 19-27). Porphyry is credited with a work entitled *On the School of Plato and Aristotle Being One*. See Sorabji, R., “The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle” in Sorabji, R., (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence* (Duckworth, 1990) pp. 1-30. See also Lloyd, A. C., “The Later Neoplatonists,” in Armstrong, A.H., (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967) p. 275: “It was normally accepted that the disagreement between Aristotle and Plato was unreal or only verbal.”



as diverse species, as cause and effect, lies at the root of Eriugena's thinking. The central concern of the *Periphyseon* – the relation between Creator and creation – is articulated by means of the intellect, the contemplating mind, the faculty that is able, when correctly deployed, to distinguish the SF. In distinguishing the SF from QFs, the intellect successfully aligns itself with God.

By means of the contemplating intellect the diverse species are analysable into a simple genus, the effects are gatherable into their cause:

The inconstancy of perishable things is separated by the mind's observation from the imperishable natures in uninterrupted contemplation.<sup>65</sup>

When the contemplating mind addresses itself to, "that science which the philosophers call ἀναλυτική,"<sup>66</sup> it gathers together individuals into their species, the species into the genera, the genera into *ousia*, "until it arrives at that One (*illud unum*) which remains inseparably in itself and from which that division took its origin."<sup>67</sup>

Returning to the exegetical passage from Book III it is now possible to see how Eriugena intends the relationship between Substance and SF to be understood.

The inconstancy of perishable things is separated by the mind's observation (*mentis contuitu*) from the imperishable natures in uninterrupted contemplation, soon the immutable and most beautiful firmness of the [substantial] forms and species will become manifest in their genera to the mind's gaze (*animi obtutibus*).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> III 702C

<sup>66</sup> II 526A

<sup>67</sup> II 526AB; I 472B; I 463AB; see also *Johannis Scotti Eriugena Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem* CCCM 31 (Turnholt 1975) VII, 583 p. 106: *Due quippe partes sunt dialectice discipline, quarum una ΔΙΑΠΕΤΙΚΗ, altera ΑΝΑΛΥΤΙΚΗ nuncupatur. Et ΔΙΑΠΕΤΙΚΗ quidem divisionis vim possidet; dividit namque maximorum generum unitatem a summo usque deorsum, donec ad individuas species perveniat, inque eis divisionis terminum ponat; ΑΝΑΛΥΤΙΚΗ vero ex adverso sibi posite partis divisiones ab individuīs sursum versus incipiens, perque eosdem gradus quibus illa descendit, ascendens convolvit et colligit, easdemque in unitatem maximorum generum reducit, ideoque reductiva dicitur sive reductiva* In the *De Praedestinatione* Eriugena divides dialectic into four species - dialectic, horistic, apodictic and analytic (*De Prae* 358A). On Eriugena's use of dialectic see J. Trouillard, "La Notion d'analyse chez Erigène," in R. Roques (ed.), *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: CNRS, 1977) pp. 349-356 and Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 139-153.

<sup>68</sup> III 702C



The SFs become manifest to the mind's eye *in their genera*. Genus is predicable of SFs on account of their eternally subsisting in their genus: *Ousia* or specific substance. And this substance in turn subsists wholly and eternally and immutably in them. Thus Eriugena argues that

'Man' is no greater in the infinite multiplication of human nature into its indivisible species than in that unique and first man who became the first to partake of it, nor was it less in him than in all whose bodies are multiplied out of him, but in all it is one and the same and in all it is equally [whole], and in none does it admit any variation or dissimilarity. The case is the same with all substantial forms (*substantialis formis*); in horse, in ox, in lion and in the other animals, in trees also and in crops a like rule is established.<sup>69</sup>

And on the basis that a species is no greater throughout all its instances, nor is it less in a single instance than in all, Eriugena feels justified in arguing against the opinion of the 'dialecticians' who claim that all that there is is either a subject or what is predicated of a subject or what is in a subject.<sup>70</sup> Instead, he states, "if right reason is consulted... 'subject' and 'what is predicated of a subject' are one, and differ in no respect."<sup>71</sup> And the example he gives to illustrate his point is the subject and first substance Cicero, and the predicate and second substance (*secunda substantia*), 'man.' The dialecticians would predicate 'man' of Cicero, so that 'man' is said of Cicero. But since the species / second substance / SF 'man' is total and one and indivisible in all its individual instances, and since all the individual instances – Cicero, Socrates, and so on – are one and indivisible in the species, then, Eriugena asks, what possible difference can there be between a subject and what is predicated of a subject? Now if, as we are claiming, this identification of individual and species,

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<sup>69</sup> III 703AB; see also I 471A; I 472C: *Nil aliud esse video in quo naturaliter inesse οὐσίᾱ possit nisi in generibus et speciebus a summo usque deorsum descendentibus, hoc est a generalissimis usque ad specialissima, id es individua, seu reciprocitatem sursumuersus ab individuis ad generalissima; in his enim veluti naturalibus partibus universalis subsistit.*

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Categoriae Decem*, Minio-Paluello (ed.) *Aristoteles Latinus* I, 57, p. 146: *usian neque in subiecto est neque de subiecto significatur.*

<sup>71</sup> I 470D – 471A



of first and second substance, is exactly analogous to the relation that obtains between genus and species, it follows that: species and what is predicated of species (i.e. genus) are one. Let us stick with Cicero. In order to be, Cicero must be in receipt of a SF. This SF is, as Eriugena has argued, ‘Man.’ But a SF is itself a species of the genus Substance. But, according to the analogy, if Cicero and ‘Man’ are one and the same, then SF and Substance are also one and the same.

Thus it is that the universal Substance around which or in which the other ‘accidental’ categories fall is identical to that substance or SF without which a sensible body cannot be said to exist. In the first case we are contemplating the cause, in the second the effect.

For the cause, if it be truly cause, most perfectly pre-encompasses (*praeambit*) in itself all things of which it is the cause, and perfects in itself its effects before they become manifest in anything, and when they break forth through generation into genera and visible species they do not abandon their perfection in it but fully and immutably abide (in it), and need no other perfection than it <alone> in which they subsist all at once and eternally.<sup>72</sup>

In summary, an individual SF is required for an individual body to exist, but these SFs flow from the single source of *Ousia*,<sup>73</sup> every substance flows down from general Being.<sup>74</sup> That is, every individual substance flows down from Substance. But, “one and the same thing is made known by the investigations of the contemplation in one way in its causes, in another way in its effects.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the individual substance or SF, without which a particular sensible body cannot be said to exist is identical to that universal Substance in which the other nine categories subsist, and without which they can in no way subsist.

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<sup>72</sup> II 547A

<sup>73</sup> I 494B

<sup>74</sup> II 605B

<sup>75</sup> III 704B



Or, to put it another way, since a genus subsists wholly and eternally and immutably in each of its species and individuals, and since SFs are in *Ousia* as their genus,<sup>76</sup> it follows that SF is the same thing as Substance or *Ousia*, just as the individual term ‘Cicero’ has the same referent as ‘Man.’ And therefore, again, the individual’s SF is identical to the general or universal Substance.

### III : Substance and the Contemplating Mind

Having delineated in some detail the relations between substance and accident, and between SF and substance or *Ousia* we can now consider substance or SF as an object of the contemplating mind.

Eriugena denies that the SF falls within the range of a human’s intellectual grasp. No substance or essence of any creature, whether visible or invisible, can be comprehended by the intellect or by the reason as to what it is.<sup>77</sup> *That* it is becomes apparent to the senses as we come to contemplate it in the genera proceeding from their cause, in the species proceeding from the genus.

Essences cannot be understood to be unless through the attachment of attributes, categories and sensible species.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore we are not required to have intellectual access to *Ousia* in itself in order to refer to it as the substantial ground of all bodies. Instead we can rely for justification on a causal theory that allows us to assert that every effect subsists in its cause, and that the causes subsist wholly, eternally and immutably in each of their effects.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> I 494A

<sup>77</sup> I 443B; I 471B: *οὐσίαν* omnino in omnibus quae sunt per se ipsam incomprehensibilem non solum sensui sed etiam intellectui esse.

<sup>78</sup> IV 779B; I 487AB: *οὐσία* itaque nullo modo diffinitur quid est sed diffinitur quia est. Ex loco nanque, ut diximus, et tempore accidentibusque aliis quae sive in ipsa seu extra intelliguntur esse tantummodo datur non quid sit sed quia est.

<sup>79</sup> V 867AB

As part of his exegesis of the text, “Let the waters which are under the firmament be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear,” (Gen. 1:9) Eriugena claims that

the contemplating mind first assembles the fluctuating inconstancy of matter and the form attached to it, like turbulent waves, into one place in the intelligence – for matter and the form attached to it can be combined under a single meaning since they produce a single body – that substantial form which is always stable by reason of the natural firmness of its nature will not become apparent to the mind’s eye.<sup>80</sup>

For Eriugena the sub-celestial waters represent the unstable flux of matter and the forms (QFs) that attach to it. The dry land is that substantial Form (SF) that is not subject to change, and which is here placed firmly outside of our epistemic grasp. A few lines later he seems to contradict his negative assessment of the human intellect in its attempt to grasp the substantial forms:

As when the waters recede and are collected from all sides into their beds the shores begin to appear far and wide, bare and dry and solid, so when the inconstancy of perishable things is separated by the mind’s observation from the imperishable natures in uninterrupted contemplation, soon the immutable and most beautiful firmness of the [substantial] forms and species will become manifest in their genera to the mind’s gaze.<sup>81</sup>

So, according to Eriugena, the gathering together of the sub-celestial waters in one place is to be interpreted as an, “operation of reason”<sup>82</sup> by which process the intellect is finally able to gaze upon the substantial forms, or dry land.

As was found in the previous section, SF is to be understood in two ways. In the first passage, in which substance “will not become apparent to the mind’s eye,” the specific substance is still subsisting in its cause, *Ousia* or generic substance. In the second passage, in which substance “will become manifest to the mind’s gaze,” generic substance has proceeded into its species, specific substances. Hence,

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<sup>80</sup> III 702B

<sup>81</sup> III 702C

<sup>82</sup> III 703C: *actu rationis*.



contemplated as to its cause, which is *Ousia*, the specific substance or SF continues to be wholly beyond the grasp of the intellect, contemplated as to its effects on the other hand, it is accessible to the mind's eye. It follows that substance is both available and unavailable to the contemplating mind. Since access to the contemplating mind is, for Eriugena, that which determines a thing's existence,<sup>83</sup> this dual predication of 'available' and 'unavailable' has profound metaphysical implications.

The placing of substance within reach of the intellectual faculty leads Eriugena to make the claim that, "the understanding of things is what things really are."<sup>84</sup> The steps in his argument can be reconstructed as follows:

- 1) Eriugena accords to the form or species of an object in the perceiving mind a superior ontological status to that form which is embodied in the subject perceived:

To understand something is to have a species of it in the mind. And this species in the mind of the knower is of a higher nature than the species found in bodies since those species in the mind are incorporeal.<sup>85</sup>

- 2) That which perceives is, according to Eriugena, necessarily greater than that which is perceived, just as that which understands is greater than that which is understood.<sup>86</sup>
- 3) A cause is necessarily greater than its effects.<sup>87</sup>

For Eriugena the species in the mind of the perceiver must be the cause of that species which is perceived (not the other way around), since the form in the mind of the perceiver is greater than that form in the perceived body. It follows that the sensible species (QFs) of bodies are somehow brought into being by the presence of

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<sup>83</sup> I 443AB

<sup>84</sup> II 535CD: *intellectus enim rerum veraciter ipsae res sunt.*; Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* i.3.

<sup>85</sup> IV 766AB; cf. Augustine, *De Trin.* IX.11.16.

<sup>86</sup> I 485B; IV 766B: *quod enim intelligit melius esse quam quod intelligitur, ratio docet.*

<sup>87</sup> III 663C: *causa melior erit his quorum causa est.*



corresponding forms in the perceiving mind. The mind is responsible not only for how the world appears, but how the world is, since appearance is, according to the first mode of being and non-being, that which accounts for the ontological structure of reality.<sup>88</sup> A peculiarity of this structure, however, is that that which *per excellentiam suae naturae* falls outside of the grasp of the intellectual faculty – and therefore is not – is accorded by Eriugena a higher status than that which is cognisable, and therefore is.<sup>89</sup>

In Book III of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena suggests that the SF is hidden (*occulta*)<sup>90</sup> beneath the waves of the accidents which obscure it from the gaze of the intellect (*intellectualibus oculis*).<sup>91</sup> In other words it is the fault or failing of the intellect that accounts for the obscuring of the substance. The fact that SF is hidden seems not, on this account, to be due to its inherent nature, but to its being invested by QFs. And this in turn is because of the nature of the intellect. Ultimately it is due to the *fallen* or sinful nature of man's epistemic capacity. The Fall of man is the subject of Chapter Three.

Eriugena provides further argument for the unknowability of SF as part of his theory of the Primordial Causes which comprise the second division of *natura*, that 'species' of *natura* that is both created and creative.<sup>92</sup> *Ousia* or Substance, of which the SFs are the substantial species, is itself the second of the Primordial *Causes* after

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<sup>88</sup> I 443A: *omnia quae corporeo sensui vel intelligentiae perceptioni succumbunt vere ac rationabiliter dici esse, ea vero quae per excellentiam suae naturae non solum omnem sensum sed etiam omnem intellectum rationemque fugiunt iure videri non esse.*

<sup>89</sup> See Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p. xiii: "For Eriugena ontology is not the most fundamental or universal discipline; in fact, he develops a negative dialectic which counterbalances ontological affirmations and constructions with a radical meontology, giving the most detailed analysis of non-being since Plato's *Sophist* and *Parmenides*." See also Moran, *op. cit.* pp. 212-240; See also, O' Meara, Dominic, "The concept of Natura in John Scottus Eriugena (De divisione naturae Book I), *Vivarium* XIX, 2 (1981) pp. 126-145.

<sup>90</sup> III 704A

<sup>91</sup> III 704A

<sup>92</sup> I 441B



Goodness.<sup>93</sup> And the Primordial Causes surpass even the purest intellects,<sup>94</sup> and are “perceived by no sense and comprehended by no intellect and have earned the name of ‘darkness’ because of the ineffable excellence of their purity.”<sup>95</sup> Thus God’s command, “Let there be light!” is interpreted by Eriugena as God’s issuing the order for the primordial causes to

proceed from the incomprehensible hiding-places of their nature into forms and species comprehensible and manifest to the understanding of those who contemplate them.<sup>96</sup>

And in a passage we have already quoted, Eriugena states that

essences cannot be understood to be unless through the attachment of attributes, categories and sensible species.<sup>97</sup>

It follows therefore that SF, subsisting in the Primordial Cause, *Ousia*, can be known only by means of the accidental forms that adhere to it and which have *their* cause in the perceiving mind. And since it is not in itself accessible to the intellect, to reason or the senses, it can, “by a certain human convention” be said not to be.<sup>98</sup>

#### i) Substantial non-being:

As has already been noted, according to the first mode of being and non-being, “those things which because of the excellence of their nature elude not only all sense but also all intellect and reason (*omnem intellectum rationemque*) rightly seem not to be.”<sup>99</sup>

And Eriugena explicitly applies this rule to, “the reasons and essences of all things that are created by Him.”<sup>100</sup> And since we have identified the essence and cause of a creature with its SF, it is therefore the case that the SF of a body is epistemically

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<sup>93</sup> III 627C: *divinae siquidem bonitatis proprium est quae non erant in essentiam vocare.*

<sup>94</sup> II 550B: *purissimos intellectus superantem.*

<sup>95</sup> II 550C

<sup>96</sup> III 692C

<sup>97</sup> IV 779B

<sup>98</sup> I 444D-445A.

<sup>99</sup> I 443B

<sup>100</sup> I 443B

unavailable, and therefore is not. Predicating non-being of SF is an essential component of Eriugena's apophatic thesis:

For if the understanding of all things is all things, and It alone understands all things, then It alone is all things.<sup>101</sup>

The SF of a given object is unavailable to the senses and the intellect inasmuch as God is unavailable since the SF ultimately subsists in God, and indeed is God. And this unavailability is warrant (under the first mode of being and non-being) for claiming that SF (and *a fortiori* God) are not.<sup>102</sup>

What does it mean to predicate non-being of substance or SF? It might mean that there are no universals, no 'man' only individual men, no 'horse' only individual horses. From this point of view Eriugena would resemble a strict nominalist. But this cannot be right. As we have shown, Eriugena identifies the subject with what is said of a subject, and what is said of a subject is the second substance, the SF, 'man', 'horse' etc. This is not nominalism, rather it is hyper-realism: the individual *is* the genus that subsists whole and eternal in each of its instances, as their cause, as their substantial form.

Thus for Eriugena, Cicero is 'Man', and 'Man' is Cicero. It follows that contemplated as to his cause, Cicero *is not*. And of course the same is true of all individual creatures. Cicero, insofar as he is cognitively available, (and is thus and so) is only a concourse of QFs subsisting in and around unknowable substance.

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<sup>101</sup> III 632D

<sup>102</sup> For Eriugena's negative theology see, McGinn, B. J., "Negative Theology in John the Scot" *Studia Patristica* 13 (1975) pp. 232-8. See also, Carabine, Deirdre, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Louvain, 1995); Sells, Michael, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, 1994); Duclow, Donald, "Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scottus Eriugena," *The Journal of Religion* 57 (April 1977) pp. 109-23.



The SF is not, therefore, on account of the excellence of its nature. The excellence of its nature, according to Eriugena, consists in its immutability, its wholeness (that is its lack of parts, or its simplicity) and its eternity.

ii) *Virtus, Vis* and *Potestas*:

There is another reason why non-being is predicable of substance. According to the Third Mode of Being and Non-Being,

whatsoever is still held in the folds of nature and is not manifest as to form or matter, place or time, and the other accidents... is said not to be.<sup>103</sup>

This is non-being on account of latency, or potentiality. For Eriugena, all things are both eternal and made,<sup>104</sup> depending on whether they are understood as to their cause or as effects, as remaining or proceeding.

The eternity of all things is expressed as their subsistence as causes in the Word of God potentially (*vi et potestate*).<sup>105</sup>

For they were always as causes in the Word of God potentially (*vi et potestate*), beyond all places and times, beyond all generation <made> in place and time, beyond all form and species known to sense and intellect, beyond all quality and quantity and the other accidents by means of which it is understood of the substance of any creature that it is, though not what it is.<sup>106</sup>

We have already identified the SF as the cause of the existence of an individual in the sense that without SF the individual creature could exist only in the highly attenuated sense that a geometrical figure or imaginary body exists. Likewise Eriugena's universal *Ousia* or Substance we found to be the causal ground of all accidental categories inasmuch as "without it they are not able to be."<sup>107</sup> We might be tempted,

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<sup>103</sup> I 443D: *quicquid vero adhuc in ipsis naturae sinibus continetur neque in forma vel materia loco vel tempore caeterisque accidentibus apparet... dicitur non esse.*

<sup>104</sup> III 666B: *omnia quae ex deo sunt et aeterna simul esse et facta.*

<sup>105</sup> III 665A *et passim.*

<sup>106</sup> III 665AB; see also III 669B

<sup>107</sup> I 467D



therefore, to assume that universal Substance and individual SFs are the ‘causes’ of the accidental categories and QFs respectively. But Eriugena thinks that it is impossible for causes to ‘jump’ genera. In other words he does not allow Substance to be the cause of Quality, nor does he allow SF to be the cause of QFs instantiated in (and composing) natural bodies. Quality is the cause of QF; Substance is the cause of SF. However, it seems that we *are* justified in thinking of Substance and SF as indirect causes of the accidental categories and individual bodies respectively in that they are the necessary preconditions of the latter. If we are correct in identifying the SF with the cause of the existence of an individual and Substance with the cause of the accidental categories then we must ascribe to SF and Substance itself that potentiality Eriugena claims is the property of the cause.

Eriugena characterises potentiality as a mark, if not a condition, of non-being:

To this mode [the third mode according to which being or non-being can be predicated of a subject] belongs the reasoning which considers the potentiality (*virtutem*) of seeds, whether in animals or in trees or in plants. For during the time when the potentiality (*virtus*) of the seeds is latent in the recesses of nature, because it is not yet manifest it is said not to be; but when it has become manifest in the birth and growth of animals or of flowers or of the fruits of trees and plants it is said to be.<sup>108</sup>

This argument, though related to the argument for non-being from cognitive unavailability or from excellence, is somewhat different. Here it is not that which resides in its cause that is said not to be, but the power (*virtus*) that is latent in seeds. It may be objected, therefore, that Eriugena uses ‘*virtus*’ to describe the potentiality latent in seeds, whereas for the potentiality of the cause or SF subsisting eternally in *Ousia* which in turn subsists in the Word of God he uses ‘*vis*’ and ‘*potestas*’. Does the terminological variation reflect a philosophical distinction? In other words are

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<sup>108</sup> I 445BC



there, according to Eriugena, differing ‘modes’ of potentiality, only one of which belongs to the causes?

In Book III of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena draws a lengthy and complex analogy between the relation of numbers to the monad and of causes to their effects. Numbers, he claims, subsist in the monad *vi et potestate*, just as causes are in the Word of God *vi et potestate*.<sup>109</sup> Eriugena defines the ‘force’ (*vis*) of numbers as that substantial virtue (*substantialis...virtus*) “by which they [i.e. the numbers] subsist eternally and immutably in the monad.”<sup>110</sup> He goes on to define ‘*potestas*’ as the possibility proper to numbers, “by which they are able to be multiplied and become manifest to intellects by certain terminological distinctions, quantitative diversities.”<sup>111</sup> It is tempting, on the basis of the analogy, to identify ‘*vis*’, the substantial virtue of numbers eternal in the monad, with the substantial form (SF); and to identify ‘*potestas*’, the potentiality of numbers to be multiplied and made manifest, with the qualitative form (QF), that by means of which a body is rendered manifest.

The term common to both sides of the analogy – the numerical and the seminal – is ‘*virtus*’. In the latter case ‘*virtus*’ is given as the potentiality proper to seeds, in the former the *substantialis virtus* is the force of numbers by which they subsist eternally and immutably in the monad. As a property of seeds Sheldon-Williams translates ‘*virtus*’ as ‘potentiality’, of numbers it is rendered ‘virtue.’ If, however, we assume that Eriugena intends us to understand ‘*virtus*’ univocally then we cannot avoid concluding that the potentiality proper to seeds is the same as that force of numbers subsisting after their natural mode in the monad, and therefore, by

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<sup>109</sup> See V 869AB: *nunquid et ipsa [sc. Arithmetica] a monade incipiens, perque diversas numerorum species discedens, iterum facta resolutione ad eandem monada redit, ultra quam ascendere nescit? Nec immerito, cum omnes numeri numerorumque species ab ea incipiant, et in eam desinant, et in ea vi et potestate subsistant, quemadmodum omnia genera omnesque species rerum continentur in ουσία atque salvuntur.*

<sup>110</sup> III 657C

<sup>111</sup> III 657C



analogy, it is the same as that potentiality we claimed belonged to the SF subsisting in its cause, *Ousia*.

And yet ‘*virtus*’ as it occurs in the passage above in relation to seeds is described as being tractable to reason (*ratio*). This seems to contradict our conclusion given above that *virtus* is a property of the SF since reason, as we have seen, is the mode whereby QFs are collected into species and genera; and the SF, to which we wish to attach ‘*virtus*’ as its proper mode of potentiality, is expressly declared to be beyond the grasp of reason and in its cause, prior to its procession out into the genera, evades even the intellectual faculty.

Note that in the passage on seeds (I 445BC) there are not two ways of considering plants and animals, one way in the seed, another way in the product. Nor even are there two ways of looking at seeds. Rather there are two ways of considering the *potentiality proper to seeds*; in other words there are, according to Eriugena, two *virtutes*. There is that *virtus* qualified by the term ‘*substantialis*’ that considers the potentiality still latent in the recesses of nature; and there is the potentiality (*virtus*) that has become manifest in the birth and fruition of animals and flowers.

I take it, therefore, that *substantialis virtus* belongs to SF and it is that in virtue of which something potentially is or is not; that *virtus* which is considered in things once they have become manifest is that in virtue of which something can be said to be thus and so, and can therefore be said to belong to QF.

One problem remains. Eriugena still seems to claim that this ‘*virtus*’ of seeds is accessible to *reason*. Eriugena discusses seeds and the seminal force again in Book III. And here again he seems to argue that the force of seeds can be contemplated.<sup>112</sup> A closer examination of the text, however, reveals that it is the *effect* of this seminal

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<sup>112</sup> III 669C: *quis enim vim seminum cogitans...*



force that is contemplated. In other words the *substantialis virtus* remains beyond our view. And in fact Eriugena goes on to state that the “how and why” of this force, “surpasses all sense and intellect, and it is not to be explored by any conjectures of the mind why it is thus or thus and it is thus or thus and not otherwise.”<sup>113</sup>

And it is this potentiality, the potentiality of a cause as yet latent, its effects remaining unmanifest, that Eriugena claims can be understood not to be. So, by a certain human convention, the SF of any creature existing, can be understood not to be.

#### Conclusion:

Eriugena’s dual account of form results in paradox: at the heart of being, is non-being; at the heart of the seen is the unseen, the known, the unknown.<sup>114</sup> And the dialectic that gives expression to these paradoxes is at once the measure of our descent from the Essence that resides eternally and immutably in the Word of God, and the means whereby we are able to negotiate our return. Eriugena’s theory of form – indeed Eriugena’s metaphysical theology as a whole – is predicated upon the contemplating mind. By means of dialectic a body can be contemplated as matter, as form, as cause, as effect, in its essence, and as manifest to the senses.

The focus of this chapter was the form of the material body and it was found that this form can be contemplated in a number of ways: the reason can abstract from the individual its qualitative forms – this process is expressed in the Scriptural passage that describes the sub-celestial waters being gathered up. All but obscured by these forms is the substantial form. The SF remains eternally whole and immutable. Its cause, Substance itself, subsists wholly and eternally and immutably in each of the

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<sup>113</sup> III 669CD

<sup>114</sup> III 633A; III 678C

substantial forms. For this reason Substance is predicable of the substantial form.

Indeed they are identical, just as that which is predicable of a subject, and a subject are identical.

This chapter presented an argument to the view that the *Periphyseon* contains a complex and yet ultimately coherent view of the role form plays in the constitution of material bodies. It has been necessary, in developing the argument, to iron out a number of textual and terminological peculiarities. It was found that these ambiguities were themselves a function of Eriugena's dialectical notion of cause and effect, genus and species. Towards the end of the chapter it became apparent that Eriugena's concept of substantial form (SF) had certain metaphysical entailments – eternity, unknowability and non-being – that at first appeared puzzling, even paradoxical. It became clear, however, that these entailments had been foreseen by Eriugena and themselves formed elements of the *Periphyseon*'s overall metaphysical and theological enterprise and must therefore be retained within a model that aims to illustrate how the *Periphyseon*'s theory of material substance is coherent.

With this formal model in place, it is now necessary to turn to the other component of body: matter.



## Chapter Two : Matter

... there are two and two only, that cannot be defined, God and matter.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction:

This chapter shall be concerned with the role of matter in Eriugena's theory of material substance. Central to the examination will be the relationship between two apparently rival theories: does Eriugena's account of corporeal substance express an immaterialist theory in which matter is reducible to immaterial constituents, or a substrate theory in which matter is an irreducible ontological principle?

In the first half of the chapter we shall be concerned with a detailed analysis of Eriugena's Immaterialist Theory of corporeal substance. Worries concerning the internal coherence of the theory will be raised and shown to be groundless once nested in Eriugena's global metaphysical schema. In the second half of the chapter the focus shall be on the discussions of body within the *Periphyseon* that seem to presuppose a substrate. Finally, a difficulty with Eriugena's account of material substance, already apparent from the findings of the first chapter, will require lengthy and detailed consideration here: the problem of individuation.

### i) Creation and Formless Matter:

At the risk of stating the obvious it must straightaway be made clear that matter cannot be extrinsic to God's creation:

None of those who practise philosophy correctly will deny that unformed matter is to be reckoned in the number of all things that were made by God in His Wisdom; for how anyone can say that the causes of all things are eternally created in the Word of God, but that unformed matter does not have its own cause, I do not see. Then, if matter is included in the number of the established

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<sup>1</sup> I 499D: *duo solummodo esse quae nullo modo possunt diffiniri, deum videlicet atque materiam.*



universe it necessarily follows that its own cause will not be excluded from the number of the causes which are eternally created in the Wisdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

Those who do not practise philosophy correctly in this instance would be falling into Manichaeism. Eriugena argues that all things come from the one God, and there is nothing that does not come from him.<sup>3</sup> It follows that matter must come from God.

Eriugena expresses the view, through the mouth of the Alumnus, that

He who made the world from unformed matter also made the unformed matter from absolutely nothing.<sup>4</sup>

But for Eriugena, there is another reason for bringing unformed matter within God's creation. Eriugena wishes to take St. Paul's dictum that, *erit deus omnia in omnibus* (I Cor. 15:28) as expressing a literal truth concerning the return of all things to God; there can be no eschatological remainder, just as there is no uncreated material principle in which or through which God effects His creation. In the most well-known passages of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena argues that the *nihil* of the '*creatio ex nihilo*' is the name used to signify, "the ineffable and incomprehensible and inaccessible brilliance of the Divine Goodness."<sup>5</sup> It follows, therefore, that

He Who made the world from formless matter did not take the matter from which He made it from elsewhere, but from Himself and in Himself.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> III 636C; see also III 699C; V 890B-D

<sup>3</sup> V 956B: *ab uno enim omnia, et nihil est, quod ab eo non sit.*

<sup>4</sup> III 636D: *qui enim fecit mundum de materia informi ipse fecit informem materiem de omnino nihilo.* The view is Augustinian: cf. *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (CSEL XCI p.76): *Et ideo deus rectissime creditur omnia de nihilo fecisse, quia, etiamsi omnia formata de ista materia facta sunt, haec ipsa tamen materia de omnino nihilo facta est.* See also *Confessions*, XII, 8: *tu enim, domine, fecisti mundum de materia informi, quam fecisti de nulla re paene nullam rem. qui enim fecit mundum de materia informi ipse fecit informem materiem de omnino nihilo.* Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV, 56; *De Principiis* 2. 1. 4; 2. 9. 1. The whole patristic and early medieval discussion of the role of unformed matter in relation to the *creatio ex nihilo* arises out of a concern to show how the account of creation in Genesis can be rendered consistent with the statement at Wisdom 11:18 that, "*omnipotens manus tua creavit orbem terrarum ex materia invisibilis.*" The best discussion of the *creatio ex nihilo* in Eriugena is Piemonte, G. A., "Notas sobre la Creatio ex Nihilo en Juan Escoto Eriugena" *Sapientia* 23 (1968) pp. 38-58.

<sup>5</sup> III 680D; see Duclow, "Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scotus Eriugena," *The Journal of Religion* 57 (April 1977). See also Wolfson, H. A., "The Identification of Ex Nihilo with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970) pp. 53-60.

<sup>6</sup> III 699C



Of course it does not follow from this that Eriugena has no theory of material substance. On the contrary, he has a great deal to say on the subject of matter. What remains for us to ascertain here is whether he thinks of matter as somehow emergently material (an Immaterialist Theory), or whether he thinks of it as irreducibly material (a Substrate Theory). According to the Immaterialist Theory, body is an agglomeration or congregation of QFs or suchnesses. The Substrate Theory, on the other hand, demands that the forms are predicated of something.

On the one hand we find Eriugena stating that visible matter, “is made from the coming together (*coitu*) of intelligible things”<sup>7</sup> and on the other hand that, “matter by itself without form produces not body because by itself it is formless, though with the addition of form it becomes a perfect body.”<sup>8</sup>

Although arguably not logically inconsistent, these two quotes seem to point towards radically different conceptions of material composition to be found in the *Periphyseon*. On the first view we seem to have a ‘unified’ theory: it is the same stuff, composed in the same way, all the way down – a coagulation of immaterial properties. According to this view no analysis of material composition, however thorough, will ever distinguish between body and formless matter. In fact we could go so far as to say that on this view ‘matter’ and ‘body’ mean the same thing. Or if they express a difference it is one of degree.

On the other view ‘matter’ does mean something substantially different from ‘body’ since body requires matter as its ground:

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<sup>7</sup> III 663A. For the coming together of immaterial qualities Eriugena also uses: *armonia* (I 501B); *concursus* (I 498B); *confluxus* (III 713C); *conventus* (III 714A); *synodus* (III 714A). This list is in Moran, “Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*. An Examination of Eriugena’s Understanding of the Physical World,” O’ Rourke (ed.) *At the Heart of the Real. Philosophical Essays in Honour of the Most Reverend Desmond Connell Archbishop of Dublin* (Irish Academic Press, 1992) p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> III 701A

In every body whether heavenly or earthly or watery is also observed the inconstant flux of formless matter.<sup>9</sup>

Here it seems that an analysis of body will yield a ‘remainder’, a material substrate.

Since our overall goal is to render an account of a single Eriugenian theory of material substance, we cannot allow these references to matter to fall outside of the scope of the theory; they must be included. So let us first of all eliminate one possibility: that Eriugena is presenting two wholly inconsistent theories of material substance. Settling for such a view would represent an hermeneutical dead end. For the sake of our enquiry, therefore, I suggest we apply a principle of charity and assume that Eriugena at least intends the definitions of body and corporeal composition in the *Periphyseon* to be mutually coherent to the extent that, taken together, they represent a single theory. Before attempting to solve the apparent discrepancy let us examine the evidence of both the Immaterialist Theory and the Substrate Theory.

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<sup>9</sup> III 701B



## I : The Problem : Two Theories

### A) Eriugena's Immaterialist Theory:

Following Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena makes the claim in Book I of the *Periphyseon* that

1. matter is nothing else but a certain composition of accidents which proceeds from invisible causes to visible matter. Not unreasonably: for if in this corporeal and dissoluble matter there should be any simple, immutable, and quite indissoluble essence, then it could not be wholly dissolved by any thought or action. But in fact it [i.e. visible matter] is dissolved: therefore there is nothing in it which is indissoluble...<sup>10</sup>

And again that

2. matter is nothing else, and has no other cause for its establishment, but the tempered mixture, among themselves in themselves and not in another, of things which are contemplated by the eye of wisdom alone.<sup>11</sup>

Let us take 1 and 2 as definitional of an immaterialist theory of material substance.

Together the statements explicitly state that,

- i) there is no underlying substance in which the 'accidents', or 'things contemplated by the eye of wisdom alone' inhere, and therefore that,
- ii) the 'accidents' or 'intelligible things' are mixed or composed one with another in order to constitute visible matter, and therefore (according to 1 only),
- iii) visible matter is wholly dissoluble.
- iv) It is also claimed (in 2 alone) that matter has no cause other than the mixture of intelligible things.

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<sup>10</sup> I 479B-C; Cf. I 501B: *sint necessario fateberis corpora in incorporea posse resolui ita ut corpora non sint sed paenitus soluta*. A. H. Armstrong notes that the passage from Gregory of Nyssa on which 1 is based (*De hominis opificio* 24, PG44 212D) may have been influenced by Plotinus, *Enn.* II, 4, 11: "As actions and productions, times and motions, though they have no substratum of matter (ὑποβολήν ὕλης) in them, yet rank among beings; thus also neither is it necessary that the first bodies should have a matter..., but that each of them should be wholly that which it is, being more various by the mixture with things that have their composition from many forms. So that this matter without magnitude (το ἄμέγεθες ὕλης) is a vain name." For the influence of this passage on Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa see Armstrong, A.H., "The Theory of the Non-existence of Matter in Plotinus and the Cappadocians," *Studia Patristica* V (Berlin, 1962) pp. 427-429.

<sup>11</sup> I 498B

Only a theory of which statements expressing i) – iv) are true will qualify as an immaterialist theory.

Before proceeding to test our definition in the field as it were, we need to analyse in more detail some of the statements of 1 and 2.

i) *Accidentium Quandam Compositionem*:

What does Eriugena mean us to understand by ‘accidents’ in 1? Immediately preceding this passage Eriugena has stated that some of the categories, namely Quantity, Quality, Situation and Condition, when they come together constitute matter and are perceived by bodily sense.<sup>12</sup> The remaining categories – *Ousia*, Relation, Place, Time, Action and Passion – “appear in nothing and remain forever incorporeal”; they are never accessible to corporeal sense.<sup>13</sup> So it looks as though Eriugena intends the *accidentium quandam compositionem* to comprise Quantity, Quality, Situation and Condition. In order for this identification to be properly secure, however, we need to make quite sure that Eriugena uses the term ‘accident’ to refer to an Aristotelian category elsewhere. It is important to be clear that, although Eriugena is using “accident” to refer to an Aristotelian category, we are not talking here about QFs, such as “blue”, “one foot long”, “running” and so on, but the categories as classes of accidents. Near the beginning of the discussion of the categories the Nutritor asks,

although there are ten Categories, is not one of them called essence or substance, while nine are *accidents* subsisting in the substance? For they cannot subsist by themselves. Essence appears to be in all, for without it they are not able to be.<sup>14</sup>

And in Book III the Nutritor argues that all things

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<sup>12</sup> I 479A

<sup>13</sup> I 479A

<sup>14</sup> 467D (italics mine)



were always as causes in the Word of God potentially, beyond all places and times, beyond all generation made in place and time, beyond all form and species known to sense and intellect, beyond all quality and quantity and the other *accidents* by means of which it is understood of the substance of any creature that it is.<sup>15</sup>

On the basis of these passages and others it seems Eriugena believes that, since the nine categories require for their instantiation a prior *Ousia* they can properly be thought of and referred to as accidents of *Ousia* although they do not proceed from *Ousia*. Indeed Quantity is described by Eriugena as, “an accident of essence.”<sup>16</sup>

Visible matter is, for Eriugena therefore, a bundle comprising Quantity, Quality, Situation and Condition investing a substantial form;<sup>17</sup> the sensible creature comprises the stability of a substantial form with the mutability of natural qualities.<sup>18</sup>

## ii) The Categories:

Eriugena is clearly not thinking of the categories as just predicables as, arguably, Aristotle does. Rather he assumes them to be genera under which falls the whole of God’s creation.<sup>19</sup> And in making this assumption he is following the dominant strand in the tradition of commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories*. Porphyry, for example, in Boethius’ translation describes the categories as “*prima decem genera*.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the

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<sup>15</sup> III 665A-B (italics mine)

<sup>16</sup> I 470B

<sup>17</sup> Richard Sorabji asserts that Eriugena has a “bundle theory of substance.” See Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion* (Cornell, 1988) p. 51. Moran suggests that the view that there is no underlying material substrate and that all visible matter consists in qualities derives ultimately from Plotinus, and he cites as an example *Ennead* VI 3, 8, 19-37. See Moran, “Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*. An Examination of Eriugena’s Understanding of the Physical World,” O’ Rourke (ed.) *At the Heart of the Real. Philosophical Essays in Honour of the Most Reverend Desmond Connell Archbishop of Dublin* (Irish Academic Press, 1992) p. 77 n.30.

<sup>18</sup> V 958C: *in his enim omnibus et naturalis substantiarum integritas, et qualitatium naturalium mutabilitas custoditur.*

<sup>19</sup> I 463A: *omnium rerum quae post deum sunt et ab eo creata innumerabiles varietates in decem universalibus generibus conclusit, quae decem categorias...vocavit.*

<sup>20</sup> *Isagoge translatio Boethii*, L. Minio-Paluello and B.G. Dodd (eds.), *Aristoteles Latinus* I, 6-7 (Bruges / Paris, 1966) pp. 11.22. Of all Boethius’ work Eriugena only makes explicit reference to the *De institutione arithmetica* (at I 498BC, I 505B, III 651B, III 655AB, IV 769C) but he feels sufficiently familiar with his work to refer to him *magnificus Boetius* at IV 769C and as *magnifico Boetio summo utriusque linguae philosopho* at I 498B.



most important work on the categories that was available to Eriugena, the Pseudo-Augustinian *Categoriae Decem*, states that of the ten categories the first is *Ousia* upon which the others depend and of which the other nine are accidents.<sup>21</sup> Eriugena is simply following his sources, therefore, when he claims that Quality and Quantity are the first and greatest accidents of substance.<sup>22</sup>

As genera the categories have, for Eriugena, a real existence independent of the particulars which participate in them. These categories or genera are assimilated by Eriugena into an ontological hierarchy itself clearly derived from Porphyry's

*Isagoge*:

There is no rational division, whether it be of essence into genera or of genus into species and individuals or of the whole into its parts – for which the proper name is partition – or of the universe into those divisions which right reason contemplates therein, that cannot be brought back again by the same stages through which the division had previously ramified into multiplicity, until it arrive at the One which remains inseparably in itself and from which that division took its origin.<sup>23</sup>

So these genera contain innumerable subdivisions the taxonomy of which is the primary function of dialectic. And through the '*reversio*' or '*congregatio*' of the most specific species into the more general species, and further, the gathering of the species into the genera and finally the genera themselves into the utterly simple unity of all things, the return of all things to God is effected.

We might still wish to know how it is that the genera – in themselves incorporeal – are able to come together to create bodies. Indeed, how are they able to come together at all? After all the categories, even if they are taken to be genera, cannot play the role of universals of the sort, man, three foot long, piebald, and so on.

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<sup>21</sup> *Categoriae Decem*, Minio-Paluello (ed.), *Aristoteles Latinus* I, 51, p. 144: *Hae sunt categoriae decem, quarum prima usia est – scilicet quae novem ceteras sustinet – reliquae vero novem συμβεβήκοτα (id est accidentia) sunt.*

<sup>22</sup> I 497A

<sup>23</sup> II 526A; I 472B; I 463AB; see also *Johannis Scotti Eriugenae Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem* CCCM 31 (Turnholt, 1975) VII, 583 p. 106.



As has already been mentioned the categories are names given to classes of things – quantities, qualities, and so on – under which these universals could be ranged; they occupy, therefore, a different conceptual level. In themselves they are able to tell us nothing about the particular body that we are told comes into existence when they come together.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, these genera or class designators are immutable; they, “by no means lose their natural state and unchanging vigour.”<sup>25</sup> He even cites

Boethius on precisely this point:

And by the things which are we mean those which are neither enlarged by extension nor diminished by retraction nor changed by any variations, but ever preserve themselves in their proper strength by the exercise of their own resources. Such are qualities, quantities, forms, magnitudes, smallnesses, equalities, conditions, acts, dispositions, places, times, and whatever is found in any manner united to corporeal objects. They themselves are by nature incorporeal and flourish by reason of their immutable substance.<sup>26</sup>

So again, if these components of matter, namely qualities and quantities, situations and conditions, are immutable and indissoluble, how do they come to form endlessly changing material bodies?

The answer lies in Eriugena’s theory of causation. Returning to **1** we find that visible matter is an effect of a procession of a certain composition of accidents from invisible causes:

Matter is nothing else but a certain composition of accidents which proceeds from invisible causes [*ex invisibilibus causis*] to visible matter.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to note here that it is the *composition* that proceeds, not the accidents themselves.<sup>28</sup> The accidents themselves remain eternally in their invisible causes, it is

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<sup>24</sup> Marenbon in “John Scottus and the ‘Categoriae Decem’” (reprinted in Marenbon, *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West* (Variorum, 2000)) makes this point but since he is not addressing the question of the generation of bodies he does not pursue the problem.

<sup>25</sup> I 500B

<sup>26</sup> Boethius, *De institutione arithmetica* I, 1 (PL 63 1079D-1081A) quoted by Eriugena at IV 769C.

<sup>27</sup> I 479B

<sup>28</sup> In English the passage is ambiguous, in Latin less so: *materiam esse nisi accidentium quandam compositionem ex invisibilis causis ad visibilem materiem procedentem*. I take it that *procedentem* depends upon *quandam compositionem*.



their composition that proceeds into visibility.

Once again, what does Eriugena mean by ‘accidents’ here? We have already identified these accidents with Aristotelian categories understood as genera. But we can make a further identification. Eriugena thinks of these accidents as causes, or rather temporal causes, through which all things come to be:

By temporal causes I mean qualities and quantities and the other things which in time through generation attach themselves to substances as accidents.<sup>29</sup>

What can these temporal causes be but qualitative forms (QFs)? A QF, it was found in the last chapter, accounts for an object’s being thus and so; it is susceptible of change and is a species of one of the general categories.

But the QF or temporal cause is surely not that which can neither be enlarged nor diminished nor changed by any variation? And Eriugena (and Boethius) are clear that it is these genera that come together to produce body. Recall, however, that, according to Eriugena an effect remains eternally in its cause.<sup>30</sup>

Scripture reveals most clearly the genera and the species in which there subsist causally and invisibly whatever things (*quaecunque*) break forth through generation in quantities and qualities into the knowledge of the corporeal senses.<sup>31</sup>

The *quaecunque* are QFs, and they break forth in quantity and quality, that is as species in their genera. But since effects can be identified with their causes, species with their genera, Eriugena is able to claim that Quantity, Quality and Condition and so on come together to form body. It is not the accidental categories *in themselves* that come together, but those species in which the genera subsist wholly and immutably that come to form body.

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<sup>29</sup> III 665D

<sup>30</sup> III 687C; III 699C-D

<sup>31</sup> III 705A



In 1 therefore we can see that the description of visible matter as “composition of accidents” refers to matter as a coming-together of QFs that themselves subsist in invisible, immaterial causes: the categories. And these categories are intelligible inasmuch as they reside as a unity in the intellect, that is the Word.

In Book IV Eriugena offers a geometrical analogy:

That very triangle which endures immutably in the discipline itself (i.e. geometry), where line and angle exist together, and where there is not one place for the line, another for the angle, another for the middle, another for the extremity, another for the centre, another for the distances of the sides from the centre, another for the distances of the angles from the centre, another for the point from which the lines originate and in which the angles are enclosed by the meetings of the lines; but all these things are one in one and the same concept of the geometer’s mind, and the whole is understood in the particulars and the particulars are in the whole, and are unified in the intellect itself; for the intellect is the substantial cause of all things which it understands, and that from which the figures of the geometrical bodies proceed into their species.<sup>32</sup>

So, Eriugena argues from analogy, we should not think it strange that, since natural bodies are also composed of intelligible qualities, in just the same way as a triangle, they are also one in that nature in which there is a concept of them. And this is especially so since all our perceptions of natural bodies are also incorporeal.

All the species in which they [viz bodies] are contained are incorporeal, nor would any wise man doubt that quantities and qualities are likewise of an intelligible nature and proceed from the intelligible reasons of vital substance.<sup>33</sup>

In discussing how *Ousia* relates to the other genera, Eriugena lists the properties of each of the categories. The properties of the genera are their proper *differentiae*. Perhaps we should think of the *properties* of the genera as coming together to form bodies, and not the genera themselves. Thus Quantity has the property of number, or numerousness:

Does the property of quantity seem to you to exist anywhere but in the number of the parts, or in their spaces, or in their measures, whether those parts be continuous as are the parts of lines or of times and of other things which are

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<sup>32</sup> IV 774D-775A

<sup>33</sup> IV 775B; See Boethius, *De institutione arithmetica* I, 1 (PL 63 1079D – 1081A)



held together by continuous quantity, or are discontinuous, being marked off by definite natural limits as are numbers and every multitude...?<sup>34</sup>

The property of Quality consists in shape, and in appearance; it concerns the surface of that extension that is measured by quantity. Situation has the property of apportioning or positioning. And Condition has the property of fixity or permanence, and so on.

To summarise, it appears to be the case that Eriugena presents a *bona fide* immaterialist theory of corporeal substance in the *Periphyseon*. But this just sharpens the original problem: what to make of the references to formless or prime matter, matter that seems to fall outside of the immaterialist theory?

What we are left with it seems, are two definitions of matter: matter as a bundle of accidental immaterial qualities, and matter *sui generis*. Let us now study more carefully the references to this prime matter in the *Periphyseon*.

#### B) Eriugena's Substrate Theory:

Thus far we have found that there are clear and reasonable grounds for interpreting Eriugena as positing an immaterialist theory of material substance; a material body has only immaterial constituents: the categorial accidents.

But there is a problem. In the following passage Eriugena seems to attempt a sketch of his immaterialist theory of substance:

The nature of all sensibles... has nothing to do with the dimensions of the corporeal bulk of this world but consists of a unification of incorporeal substances.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> I 472D

<sup>35</sup> V 901A: *praesertim cum omnium sensibilium, dum in se ipsa consideratur natura, una eademque perspicitur, et in hoc mundo non magnitudinem corporeae molis, sed incorporealium substantiarum adunationem.*



At first glance this looks unproblematic. We find that all sensible bodies consist in the coming together of incorporeal substances – just what we would expect him to say if our account of his theory of substance in the first part of this chapter is correct. But what are we to make of the reference in the passage above to the corporeal bulk (*corporeae molis*) of this world? Surely the strict immaterialist has no need of such a bulk. Indeed one might suppose that the motivation for adopting an immaterialist theory in the first place would be to abandon the necessity for any such material principle. But again in reference to the return of all things to God, Eriugena chooses to make reference to the

unformed matter which was created out of nothing and from which the structure of this sensible world, by the diversity of the forms impressed upon it, is composed.<sup>36</sup>

What are we to make of these references to bulk or unformed matter within a metaphysical architecture that seems not to require it, or positively to exclude it?

Were we wrong to conclude earlier in favour of immaterialism? Once again I suggest we deploy a principle of charity and assume, at least for now, that Eriugena is not simply inconsistent. It falls to us, therefore, to show a) what role Eriugena ascribes to matter in the composition of bodies, and b) how, if at all, a material principle can be coherently incorporated into an immaterialist account of substance.

Let us set down a few passages that we can take as defining a theory of corporeal substance that requires a material substrate:

- 3 Every corporeal and sensible creature is composed of matter and form, and therefore matter, lacking form, is called formless, which means lacking form, and invisible and non-composite, or waste and void.<sup>37</sup>
- 4 Matter in itself, if rationally considered, is neither in motion nor at rest. It is not in motion since it does not yet begin to be contained within a definite form – for it is through form that matter is moved; without form it is immobile,

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<sup>36</sup> V 960CD: *materies informis, quae de nihilo facta est, et ex qua diversitate formarum sibi adiuncta huius mundi sensibilis componitur structura.*

<sup>37</sup> II 548B



according to the Greeks – for how will that be moved which is not yet limited by any place or fixed time? And it is not at rest because it does not yet possess the end of its perfection. For rest is the end of motion. But how can that be at rest which has not yet begun to move? How therefore can the matter of a body be the place of the body which is made from it, when even matter itself is not, in itself, circumscribed by any certain place or mode or form, and is not defined in any definite way save by negation? For it is negatively defined as not being any one of the things that are, since it is from it that all the things that are created are believed to be made.<sup>38</sup>

Before attempting to answer the question of Eriugena's consistency I suggest we spend some time examining precisely what Eriugena means us to understand by 'matter.'

i) *Materia Informis* – a definition:

Let us begin with a comparison. On the basis of the last sentence of 4 we can now begin to understand the apparently paradoxical similarity between God and matter that was highlighted in the quotation at the head of this chapter: God and matter are the only two things that can in no way be defined, the reason being their formlessness, God because he is More-than-form, and matter, "by reason of its being deprived of all forms."<sup>39</sup>

As a result of their formlessness both God and matter are, according to Eriugena, inaccessible to the senses. God is formless inasmuch as he is without form and beyond form since he forms everything that can be formed; matter on the other hand is formless in virtue of its lacking form. It is the passive recipient of form. As authority for this view Eriugena is quick to mention the unanimity of Augustine and Plato on this score:

St. Augustine... asserts that formless matter is the mutability of mutable things which is receptive of all forms: and with this Plato agrees in the 'Timaeus',

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<sup>38</sup> I 488AB

<sup>39</sup> I 500B



saying in similar language that formless matter is the receptivity of the forms.<sup>40</sup>

But the Pseudo-Dionysius offers a different definition that Eriugena cannot ignore.

Dionysius claims that, “matter is participation in adornment and form and species, for without these matter is formless and cannot be understood in anything.”<sup>41</sup> Eriugena

realises that this definition of matter does not coincide with Augustine or Plato.

Matter, on the Augustinian/Platonic view, is formless on account of its being receptive of all forms. According to Dionysius, however, matter just is participation in form. The two definitions seem almost contradictory: on the one hand matter is formless, on the other, matter is participation in form. Nevertheless, Eriugena attempts a partial reconciliation:

Whether formless matter is a mutability receptive of forms, as Augustine and Plato say, or a formlessness which lacks participation in species and form and adornment, as Dionysius says, you will not deny, I think, that if it can be understood at all, it is perceived only with the intellect.<sup>42</sup>

But any success we might hope to subscribe to this reconciliation is illusory. Eriugena has himself, only a couple of lines above, recognised that, on the Dionysian account, that which fails to participate in form and species, is not matter but something else – a formlessness.

That which lacks participation in adornment and form and species is not matter but a certain formlessness.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> I 500C-D. Eriugena describes Plato as *philosophantium de mundo maximus* (I 476C) even though of Plato's works he may have only the *Timaeus* in Calcidius' partial translation, and perhaps not even this but only Calcidius' commentary. For the availability of Calcidius in the ninth century see Edouard Jeauneau, “L'Heritage de la Philosophie Antique” in his *Etudes Erigeniennes* (Etudes Augustiniennes Paris, 1987) pp.39-40; Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigene, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Sa Pensee*, (Louvain-Paris, 1933) p.392 n.4; E. Mensching, “Zur Calcidius-ueberlieferung” in *Vigiliae Christianae* 19 (1965) pp.42-56. For Eriugena's Platonism in general see, Beierwaltes, W., “Eriugena's Platonism” *Hermathena* 149 (Winter 1990) pp. 53-72.

<sup>41</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* IV. 28 (PG3 729A) quoted by Eriugena at I 500D

<sup>42</sup> I 501A

<sup>43</sup> I 501A: *quod ornatus et formae et species participatione caret materia non est sed quaedam informitas*.



But then in the passage above he assumes that that which, “lacks participation in species and form” is an accurate rendering of Dionysius’ definition of matter. And he continues to confuse the situation still further when he asks,

Do you think that the species and form and adornments themselves, by participation in which that formlessness or mutability we mentioned is changed into matter, is considered by any other means than by the eye of the mind?<sup>44</sup>

For Dionysius matter is participation in form and species and adornment. But Eriugena reads him as claiming that formlessness is changed into matter by participation in species and form and adornment. So there is the added claim made by Eriugena that matter, in order to be matter, must have undergone some sort of change. And here Eriugena’s reading of Dionysius leads him into a regress: prime matter, if it is to serve any metaphysical function, must be the substratum upon which a body is constructed; it itself cannot in turn require some further, more fundamental principle out of which it is formed or changed since if it were formed or changed there would have to be a prior underlying thing from which it came to be. But that is precisely what matter itself is: that from which all change begins, and a component of that which changes.<sup>45</sup> In fact it is precisely the fact that matter can be shown to serve no *necessary* metaphysical function that underpins the immaterialist’s thesis.

At no point does Dionysius make the claim that formlessness is changed into matter; for him matter is simply identified as participation. So why does Eriugena twist Dionysius in this way? An answer to this question will lead us to an understanding of the concerns Eriugena brings to bear in his definition of matter. I suggest that Dionysius’ identification of matter with participation is not ‘materialist’ enough for Eriugena. Eriugena clearly endorses the Augustinian/Platonic definition of

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<sup>44</sup> I 501A

<sup>45</sup> *Physics* I.9. 192a25-192b4



matter as bulk. The distortions we have brought to light in his analysis of the Dionysian definition are attempts to draw a favoured source into line with the view that matter is formless *stuff* receptive of all forms.

On either view – the Dionysian or the Augustinian/Platonic – Eriugena claims, matter is accessible only to the intellect; in itself it is invisible and formless.<sup>46</sup> Again the similarity between our epistemic relations with matter and God is stressed: neither is perceivable directly; both have to be inferred by means of the intellect from the appearance of things.

For Eriugena, therefore, matter is formless stuff, perceivable only by the intellect. And so now that we have a definition of unformed matter we can begin to ponder its role in the overall scheme of Eriugena's metaphysical theology. According to Eriugena's exegesis, Genesis 1:9, the 'third day' of creation, refers to the constitution of, "soluble and perishable bodies themselves which occupy the lowest place of the whole creature."<sup>47</sup> The verse under discussion runs as follows:

But God said, Let the waters that are under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear, and so it was done. (Gen. 1:9)

The Alumnus is in combative mood and urges his master to

expound whatever seems to you likely to be true concerning the question to be solved without fear of anyone, whatever his attitude may be, whether dazzled by the light of truth he does not understand what you say, or consumed with the poison of envy he treats you with contempt.<sup>48</sup>

And the Nutritor is happy to oblige. He claims, as we have already noted in our analysis of Eriugena's theory of form, that the dry land represents substantial form and the sub-celestial waters, according to the hexaemeral interpretation, are the qualitative forms. But the qualitative forms invest *matter*. That is why, the Nutritor argues, they

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<sup>46</sup> III 660B

<sup>47</sup> III 700D: *ad ipsorum solubilitatem et corruptibilitatem corporum, quae infimum totius creaturae obtinet locum.*

<sup>48</sup> III 700B. Note the inspired idea that ignorance can be defined as being blinded by the light of truth.



are depicted as waters, since, as a result of their cleaving to (*adhaerens*) the flux of matter, they are subject to, “coming into being and passing away,”<sup>49</sup> and are prone to, “the same storm of incessant and turbulent inconstancy.”<sup>50</sup> Matter is subject to expansions and contractions;<sup>51</sup> and as such it is explicative of sensible changes in bodies. So although the waters and the dry land of the Genesis text refer to the kinds of forms, qualitative (QF) and substantial (SF) respectively, the former are necessarily attached to matter: they must *inform* something. And that something is matter.

Eriugena goes on to define the term ‘matter’:

Matter is the mutability of mutable things capacious of all forms, the instability of the mutable form by which the matter itself is specified and formed – for it is the qualitative form which, when combining with matter, produces body.<sup>52</sup>

There is an ambiguity in the English translation here; does Eriugena mean that matter is mutability and is capacious of all forms, or that it is the mutable things that are capacious of all forms? There is no ambiguity in the Latin:

*Materia est mutabilitas rerum mutabilium capax omnium formarum.*

Matter is capacious; it has a property.<sup>53</sup> But this cannot be a straight definition since it goes no way to defining what prime matter *is*. Rather it presents matter as a means of explaining certain properties that pertain to qualitative form – its mutability, its inconstancy. On this view matter has no ontological status beyond a necessary principle or condition, an occasion for the coming together of forms. But the definition of matter as having properties – capacity (III 701C), and immobility (I 488A), and so on – militates against the view that Eriugena posits an immaterial theory of corporeal substance. Matter must be capacious, it must allow for

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<sup>49</sup> III 701BC

<sup>50</sup> III 702A

<sup>51</sup> I 445B: *materiae distentionibus seu detractationibus*.

<sup>52</sup> III 701C-D

<sup>53</sup> Also predicated of matter is inconstant flux (*instabilis inundatio materiae*): III 701C



specification and formation; the qualitative forms combine with matter (*adiuncta materiae*) to produce a body. It seems clear that if matter is the mutability of mutable things, it is not *just* this; it explains why corporeal bodies suffer change and decay but it is more than a means of explaining this fact; it is itself *something*. Moreover it is a something that underlies many discrete bodies:

How many different bodies are made from one and the same matter!<sup>54</sup>

ii) Recapitulation:

We opened our discussion by noting that there were several apparently inconsistent theories of body in the *Periphyseon*. The most common definition we found was the view that body consists of matter and form.<sup>55</sup> This statement on its own could serve only as a starting point since both named constituents stand in need of further analysis: what is meant by form? What is meant by matter? Form we found to mean both QFs and SF; the QFs were accidents of the substantial form (SF), proceeding from the genera or categories; SF is an effect of Substance or *Ousia* itself. In particular we felt we needed to know precisely what Eriugena intends us to understand by ‘matter’. Is matter itself reducible to immaterial constituents? Or is matter an irreducible material substrate?

In order to frame a solution to our original difficulty therefore, we turned to an examination of two apparently separate and mutually inconsistent theories of body. In the first case body was defined as an agglomeration of immaterial qualities (the Immaterialist Theory). We found that all bodies were composed of the immaterial *qualities* of the elements. In the second case Eriugena seemed to imply that body

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<sup>54</sup> I 496C: *quanta diversa corpora una eademque fiunt materia!*

<sup>55</sup> See for example I 489C; I 491A; II 548B; III 701A *et passim*.

required a material substrate in which the qualitative forms inhered (the Substrate Theory). We found that far from being a redundant concept, the substrate played a clear and crucial role in Eriugena's ontology. The only philosophically available avenue, therefore, was to accept it as an element in Eriugena's theory of corporeal substance; it remains for us, therefore, to show how, if at all, the references we find in the *Periphyseon* to a material substrate can be squared with the immaterialist theory.

In the conclusion that follows I hope to show that Eriugena can consistently retain both theories without doing damage to either.

## II : The Quantum Solution

In Book I of the *Periphyseon* the Nutritor argues for a definition of body as the coming together of the *effects* of Quantity and Quality; these effects he calls quanta and qualia respectively:

For quantity and quality combine together to produce a quantum and quale, and these two, combining together and receiving generation in a certain mode at a certain time, manifest the finished body.<sup>56</sup>

Bodies are formed, the Nutritor explains, by the coming together of the quanta and qualia derived from the four elements. For Eriugena, the whole sensible environment arises as a result of the coming together of the elements:

All bodies... are composed from the coming together of the four simple elements, extending from the greatest to the smallest.<sup>57</sup>

These elements are themselves bodies but of such a fine nature as to be invisible and beyond the grasp of every mortal sense.<sup>58</sup> The elements are not mundane 'building blocks', existing just above the level of prime matter; in fact Eriugena accords them a

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<sup>56</sup> I 497AB

<sup>57</sup> III 701A: *omnium corporum ex quattuor simplicium elementorum coitu compositorum ex maximis usque ad minima.*

<sup>58</sup> I 479AB



place between the primordial causes and material bodies.<sup>59</sup> And in the Genesis account of creation they are represented by the firmament. They are that of which our mortal bodies are composed, and that to which our bodies shall return in the resurrection.<sup>60</sup>

In Book One the Nutritor dismisses the Alumnus's theory that the elements are caused by the coming together of their two qualitative causes, so water is not substantially derived from moistness and coldness. The Nutritor points out that the elements are substances and substances cannot be caused by qualities. Instead, he proposes the view that the elements are actually incorporeal substances. Each element is a species of generic substance, the qualities of the elements are species of Quality. All sensible bodies derive from the coming together of the elements, but not from the coming together of the *substances* of the elements since they are (in common with all substances) *incompactibilia et insolubilia*.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the Nutritor argues, bodies are formed by the coming together of the *qualities* of the elements.

So the sensible world is no more than the conjunction of the qualia of the four elements – heat, dryness, moistness, coldness – in quanta. And these quanta are themselves derived from the immaterial caterory, Quantity. Eriugena's concept of body and material substance is thus – by means of the quantum solution – brought into a consistent relation with the Immaterialist Theory, the Elemental Theory and the Substrate Theory. Or rather, the three theories can be shown – by means of the quantum solution – to jointly express a single, coherent notion. But the Alumnus is still confused. How can it be, he wonders,

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<sup>59</sup> III 713B: *medietatem quondam inter primordiales causas et composite corpora*.

<sup>60</sup> V 958CD

<sup>61</sup> III 712B



that things incorporeal and invisible in themselves, by coming together with one another, produce visible bodies, so that matter is nothing else, and has no other cause for its establishment, but the tempered mixture, among themselves in themselves and not in another, of things which are contemplated by the eye of wisdom alone?<sup>62</sup>

The Alumnus still cannot see how the sensible and manifest can be derived from principles that are wholly intelligible and invisible (viz immaterial categories).

Furthermore, if what is understood of the cause must also be understood of the effect, the Alumnus continues, why is that bodies are not immutable? For if the cause of a quantum is Quantity, and if Quantity in and of itself is immutable, surely the quantum must likewise be immutable?<sup>63</sup> And yet the matter or quantum of a body is that in virtue of which a body is said to suffer change. For the Alumnus the main cause for concern is his failure to see how the mixture of incorporeal constituents can *in themselves* be enough to produce body; there must be, he still thinks, *something* in which they subsist. The obvious candidate for this ‘something’ is the material substrate.

“You are seriously misled, or wish to mislead others,”<sup>64</sup> the Nutritor responds. And in order to show how the Alumnus has become confused the Nutritor asks a question: by what means is the matter itself, the matter from which bodies are made, contemplated? Is it by sense or by reason? The Alumnus replies that since the matter is unformed it cannot be perceived by any corporeal sense.<sup>65</sup> It must, therefore, be contemplated by the reason alone. The Alumnus cannot accept that the sensible and

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<sup>62</sup> I 498B; see also II 602CD: *ex una terra diversorum corporum diversae quantitates nascuntur - quantitatem nunc dico non ipsam incorpoream sed ipsam molem quam diversarum partium compositionem esse nemo ambigit*. In this passage Eriuegna seems to identify two quantities: an immaterial quantity (this we may assume refers to the category Quantity) and those quantities that come together to form visible matter, or bulk (and these we can take as quanta, effects of Quantity).

<sup>63</sup> I 499A: *nam quod de causis intelligitur cur non etiam de effectibus earum intelligatur, ut quemadmodum quantitates et qualitates caeteraque similia solo animi contuitu aspiciuntur ita et materia et corpus non sensibus corporeis sed intellectui succumbant?*

<sup>64</sup> I 499B

<sup>65</sup> I 499B



corporeal ultimately consists in intelligible, immaterial principles. But if he accepts that quanta and qualia are in themselves immaterial and invisible and are therefore, “contemplated by the eye of reason alone,” and if he likewise accepts that matter is itself contemplated by reason alone, then his double standards are obvious. Why argue against the quanta and qualia on the grounds that they are, “contemplated by the eye of reason alone” and yet accept a material substrate that is itself unavailable to the sense?

*Prima facie* this is pretty feeble. Claiming that the unformed matter of bodies is itself inaccessible to the senses does less to alleviate the Alumnus’s problem than to compound it. And of course it does not follow from the Nutritor’s answer that there is no unformed material substrate. At no point does the Nutritor attempt to argue that there is no such thing as unformed matter, or that, if it does exist, it cannot be shown to play a role in the constitution of bodies.

The Nutritor therefore fails to answer the Alumnus’ original question: how can the mixture of incorporeal and invisible things account for the manifest and sensible nature of bodies?

But perhaps this judgement is unduly harsh on the Nutritor. The Alumnus was not asking for a definition of how the corporeal and manifest is produced from the incorporeal and invisible, he was claiming not to see how it can be the case. And the Nutritor simply points out *ad hominem* that the same difficulty arises if we consider the matter “out of which bodies are made.”<sup>66</sup> In other words the Nutritor’s theory of corporeal substance cannot be shown to be false on the grounds that the constituents from which corporeal substance is derived are themselves perceivable only to reason, if the alternative theory of corporeal substance suffers from the same difficulty.

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<sup>66</sup> I 499A: *formatam materiam qua corpus efficitur [nam informis omnino intelligibilis est] sensu corporeo percipimus.*

Nevertheless, the Nutritor's *ad hominem* response to the Alumnus' query certainly does not exclude the possibility of a material substrate.

The Nutritor's apologetic, although it offers no substantive definition of material substance, does at least indicate the direction in which he is thinking. In fact the Nutritor could be seen to be suggesting some sort of middle ground between the Immaterialist Theory and the Substrate Theory; if there is unformed matter, he claims, it is invisible and can only be perceived by the eye of the mind. Underlying the Nutritor's argument here is the assertion that matter itself, far from being an irreducible principle, is itself composed of quanta. Here then may be the solution to the original problem. The quantum furnishes Eriugena with a substrate of which the QFs are predicable but which is itself ultimately an effect of an immaterial cause: Quantity. Eriugena thus synthesises the Immaterialist and Substrate theories.

The resolution of our problem lies in a dialectical analysis of matter, firstly as immaterial Quantity and secondly as a material quantum. This double identification will account both for why it is that corporeal substance is defined as requiring a material substrate for the qualitative forms and that body is itself composed of constituents that are the effects of an immaterial cause.

The solution to the problem requires us to adjust the findings of the last chapter. The material ground of any body is a quantum; the quantum derives from Quantity, an immaterial category.<sup>67</sup> The species of Quantity (quanta) becomes a subject of which the other QFs are predicated. It is the case, therefore, that our notion of QF is not fine-grained enough. Quantity, we argued previously, is a QF and it is clearly impossible to predicate a QF of a QF since QFs are defined as predicates,

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<sup>67</sup> I 478D – 479A; See I 478B: *nil aliud quantitas nisi partium quae seu sola ratione seu naturali differentia separantur*.



those things that are said of a subject or are in a subject. The species of Quantity (quanta) will, therefore, have to be removed from the list of QFs.

Quantity is, as it were, a second subject after οὐσίᾱ, and that is why it is placed first after it in the order of the categories, since without quantity quality cannot become manifest.<sup>68</sup>

In Chapter One it was discussed how the Nutritor draws a careful distinction between the SF beheld in *ousia* not as an accident but as it itself, – and the form which “from quality in combination with quantity (*quantitati adiuncta*) produces the perfect body.”<sup>69</sup> This is our finessed qualitative form (QF) from which we removed the effects of Quantity, that is quanta. The Nutritor is claiming therefore that the SF and the QF when joined to quantity, or more accurately, with the effects of Quantity (viz quanta) produces a body. Unformed matter is bare quantum. This quantum is material only in an attenuated sense; it derives from an immaterial cause, and, until it is informed by QFs at a certain time and after a certain mode, it is invisible and formless.<sup>70</sup>

The Alumnus claims to see his master’s drift: *iam video quo tendis*. Thus encouraged, the Nutritor asks a supplementary question:

Do you think I mean that it is the essential form (SF) which, in combination with matter (*materiae adiunctam*), produces the natural body?<sup>71</sup>

It has already been shown that it is not the SF that combines with matter to produce body, it is the QF. So it is less the content of the Nutritor’s question that is of interest here, than the terminology he employs. In the space of a few lines he has claimed that

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<sup>68</sup> I 496AB: *Quantitas siquidem veluti secundum subiectum est post οὐσίαν ideoque in ordine kategoriarum prima post eam ponitur, quoniam sine quantitate qualitas nescit manifesta fieri.*

<sup>69</sup> I 495B

<sup>70</sup> For Eriugena, Quantity (and therefore its effect, quantum) is measure, or number. See I 478B: *nil aliud est quantitas nisi partium quae seu sola ratione seu naturali differentia separantur certa dimensio eorumque quae naturalibus spatiis extenduntur, longitudine dico, latitudine et altitudine, ad certos terminos rationabilis progressio.*

<sup>71</sup> I 495B



- a) the perfect body is produced by form (QF) in conjunction with quantity, and,
- b) that the perfect body is produced by form (QF) in conjunction with matter.

On this basis are we justified in squaring a) and b) by identifying matter with quantity? The Alumnus elaborates the position a little later (I 495C) by claiming that the natural body is produced by that form which is brought from quality (QF) into conjunction with the quantity which is taken from matter (*adiecta quantitati quae ex materia assumitur*). But although this passage seems to confirm our earlier suspicions it also raises a problem: if quantity is unformed matter, how can quantity be taken from (*assumitur*) matter?

Although a body, which is nothing else but the quantity of οὐσία, or, to speak more accurately, not the quantity but a quantum, can be separated into parts by an act and operation or at least by suffering its own fragility, itself, that is, the οὐσία of which the body is a quantum, remains immortal and inseparable by virtue of its proper nature.<sup>72</sup>

The quantum derives from Quantity, just as QF derives from Quality, and SF derives from *Ousia*. The formula is refined thus:

A body is not the quantity of οὐσία, but a quantum, just as visible colour which is perceived about a body is not the quality of οὐσία, but a quale constituted in a quantum.<sup>73</sup>

What does it mean to say that a body is a quantum of *ousia*? One way of answering this would be to claim that the quantum in question is an accident of an individual substance or substantial form:

οὐσία itself, in so far as it is οὐσία, can by no means possess a visible or tangible or spatially extended appearance, but it is the concourse of the

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<sup>72</sup> I 492D; see also I 495AB: *si itaque naturali discretione quantitas corporis ab intellectu ousiae separatur, quamvis sibimet adhaereant, ita ut οὐσία subiectum quantitatis sit et quanti, ipsa vero quantitas seu quantum accidentia sint ousiae nonne luce clarius est aliam esse formam quae in ipsa οὐσία, non ut accidens sed ut id ipsum ei perspicitur, aliam quae ex qualitate quantitati adiuncta corpus efficit perfectum?* Note here again that the QF is ‘joined’ (*adiuncta*) to quantity in order to form the body.

<sup>73</sup> I 493A



accidents which are in it or which are understood about it which, by coming into being, is able to create something sensible and extended in space.<sup>74</sup>

This conjunction of accidental quanta and qualia “in or about” substantial form constitutes body. If in turn we wish to identify the quantum of a body with its matter we can make the following claim: a body’s matter is an accident of its substance or *ousia*. Note that the matter of a given body is an accident of its substance but not an effect of that substance; it is an effect of Quantity.<sup>75</sup> This is not somehow to deny matter the role of substrate: in order for a sensible body to be a sensible body it must have matter. Nor does the identification of matter with a quantum lead us to conclude that matter is somehow reducible to a non-material constituent; the quantum, as Eriugena is at pains to define it, *is*, (in contrast to Quantity), material:

Now the reason why I added that a body is more rightly called a quantum than quantity is that those accidents which are called natural, when regarded in themselves as they naturally are, are incorporeal and invisible and are beheld only by the eye of reason (as being) about οὐσίᾱ itself or within in it and are, as it were causes having their effects, as quantity itself and quality are the cause of a quantum and quale... that is that whereas they are invisible, they produce visible effects.<sup>76</sup>

Eriugena is here making the point that the quantum, in contrast to its cause (viz Quantity), is material and, when in conjunction with qualia, is visible. A cause is necessarily greater than its effects.<sup>77</sup> We can conclude, therefore, that,

C1     The quantum fulfils the conditions we stipulated for a material substrate.

At the same time, however, the quantum is an effect of Quantity. And as such

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<sup>74</sup> I 497A

<sup>75</sup> II 605AB: *quamvis enim qualitas in substantia contineatur – nulla siquidem qualitas per se subsistit – non tamen causam qualitatis substantiam esse dixerim; etenim omnis species suum genus sequitur quoniam a suo genere nascitur et in eo immutabiliter custoditur ac per hoc omnis substantia ex generali essentia defluit, omnis autem qualitas ex generali qualitate.*

<sup>76</sup> I 492D – I 493A

<sup>77</sup> III 663C; V 913D

it can be said to continue to subsist in its immaterial cause, Quantity.<sup>78</sup> An effect is no more than a caused cause and nothing proceeds from a cause that is foreign to the nature of that cause.<sup>79</sup> Therefore,

C2     The quantum, *qua* caused cause (Quantity), is immaterial and can therefore consistently be adopted as an element in an immaterialist theory of corporeal substance.

C1 and C2 look inconsistent but since the relationship between the quantum and Quantity is causal we can deploy Eriugena's maxim that

one and the same thing is made known by the investigations of the contemplation in one way in its causes, in another way in its effects.<sup>80</sup>

It remains now only to show how this double identification works and then to open up the investigation to include problems that arise as a result of the adoption of this formula.

The duality of the identification can be articulated by means of Eriugena's dialectical understanding of the nature of causation.

### **III : Dialectic : How Body is Grouped Intellectually**

Eriugena's being able consistently to hold both C1 and C2 as valid rests on an understanding of the nature of causation that seems to be derived wholesale from his Neoplatonic sources. Thus we find the pseudo-Dionysius making the claim that

in this divine yearning shows especially its unbeginning and unending nature travelling in an endless circle through the Good, from the Good, in the Good and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same centre, ever in the same

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<sup>78</sup> III 639C: *omne causativum semper in causa subsistit*. See also II 547A; II 552A; II 605AB; IV 860C. For the incorporeality of the categories see I 478D – 479A: *omnes igitur categoriae incorporeales sunt per se intellectae*.

<sup>79</sup> III 687C

<sup>80</sup> III 704B



direction, always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself.<sup>81</sup>

The emanationist theory of causation finds its scriptural endorsement in Paul's statement that, "*ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso omnia ipsi Gloria in saecula*" (Rom. 11:36) and is given its clearest definition by Proclus: "Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it and returns to it."<sup>82</sup>

What at first appeared to be two inconsistent theories of causation running concurrently can now be seen to express the Neoplatonic theory of a cause and its relation to effect in terms of a circular process. Firstly, there is the view that a cause is necessarily like its effect and vice versa;<sup>83</sup> the effect remains in its cause. At its strongest this theory stretches almost to the view that cause and effect are actually identical. As we have already seen, Eriugena thinks "an effect is nothing else but a made cause... for nothing proceeds from a cause into its effects that is foreign to its nature."<sup>84</sup> And again as we have already seen, an effect subsists eternally in its cause just as numbers subsist eternally in undistributed unity.<sup>85</sup> Accepting as true the view

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<sup>81</sup> *De divinis nominibus* IV, 14 (PG 4 712D – 713A) trans. Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius The Complete Works*, (Paulist Press, 1987) p. 83. Eriugena translates the Greek in his *Versio operum Sancti Dionysii – De Divinis Nominibus* as follows: *et infinitum seipso, et carens principio, divinus amor ostenditur differenter, sicut quidam aeternus cyclus, per optimum, ex optimo, et in optimo, et in optimum inenarrabili conversione circuiens, et in eodem, et per idipsum et proveniens semper, et manens, et revolutus*. (PL 122 1136D – 1137A)

<sup>82</sup> E.R. Dodds (ed.), *Elements of Theology* no. 35 (Oxford Clarendon, 1963). For the view that the pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus, "lived in the same philosophical climate" even if the latter cannot be proved to have been a direct influence on the former, see Sheldon-Williams, I. P., "The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena", *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967) p. 457 n.8. See also his "Henads and Angels: Proclus and the Pseudo-Dionysius", *Studia Patristica* vol. II (Berlin, 1972) pp. 65-71. H-D Saffrey argues for a substantial, direct influence in "New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus", O' Meara, D. (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Albany, New York, 1982) pp. 64-74.

<sup>83</sup> I 499A: *quod de causis intelligitur cur non etiam de effectibus earum intelligatur?*

<sup>84</sup> III 687C

<sup>85</sup> I 492D; III 624AB see also Lutz, C. ed., *Iohannis Scotti Annotationes in Marcianum*, (Cambridge Mass., 1939) 367.15, p. 155: *Postquam omnes numeri consummantur, monas remanet... quia supra eam nihil est, quia finis omnium in ea constat*. See Marcia Colish, "Mathematics, the Monad, and John the Scot's Conception of Nihil" in S. Knuuttila, R. Tyorinoja, S. Ebbesen (eds.), *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy: Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol. II, (Helsinki, 1990) pp. 461-483.



that an effect remains in its cause, Eriugena concludes that all things are both eternal and made:

The universe, since it is caused, that is, participates in its cause, is eternal in its cause. Therefore it is evident that the universe of the whole creation is eternal in the Word of God.<sup>86</sup>

But an effect also proceeds from its cause. When this aspect of the process is stressed a cause is characterised as necessarily greater than its effects. Eriugena's more apophatic passages are underwritten by the view that God, *qua* Cause of being, cannot himself be Being or a being: "For being is from Him but He is not Himself being."<sup>87</sup> A theology stressing this aspect of the causal process will characterise its ultimate cause as utterly transcendent. Negotiating this understanding of the cause / effect relation is the function of dialectic.

In Book V Eriugena defines dialectic as, "the science of good disputation," and he goes on to explain that it

concerns itself with οὐσία as its proper principle, from which every division and every multiplication of those things which that art [viz dialectic] discusses takes its origin, descending through the most general genera and the genera of intermediate generality as far as the most special forms and species, and again perpetually returning according to the rules of synthesis by the same steps by which it descended until it reaches that same οὐσία from which it issued forth, does not cease to return to it, in which it yearns to rest forever, and in the neighbourhood of which it seeks to operate by an activity wholly or largely intelligible.<sup>88</sup>

Clearly, therefore, good disputation is good only inasmuch as it precisely reflects certain ontological realities: the divisions of nature. In this respect the descent of all things from their ultimate cause, *Ousia*, is identical to the ascent conceived as a dialectical grouping of diverse effects into their simple causes:

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<sup>86</sup> III 639C; see also V 907D – 908B

<sup>87</sup> I 482AB

<sup>88</sup> V 869A. Compare with Hrabanus Maurus' definition: *De institutione clericorum* III. 20 (PL 107 397C): *dialectica est disciplina rationalis quaerendi, differendi, et disserendi, etiam vera a falsis discernendo potens.*



For the procession of the creatures and the return of the same are so intimately associated in the reason which considers them that they appear to be inseparable the one from the other.<sup>89</sup>

The role of dialectic and the liberal arts in the *scriptoria* of Laon, Corbie, St. Gall, Compiegne, and the other embryonic cathedral schools cannot be overstressed.<sup>90</sup> For now we need only note that the harnessing of the arts to the service of speculative theology had been established by Augustine<sup>91</sup> and that Eriugena's commentary on Martianus' *De Nuptiis* heralded a new style of line-by-line analysis of the primary text for an education in the liberal arts.<sup>92</sup>

From the time of Alcuin the liberal arts, dialectic and grammar in particular, had increasingly come to be seen as legitimate tools to be employed in the service of theology. So although Alcuin disapproved of secular learning for its own sake, in his *De vera philosophia* he prefaces his pedagogical programme with the statement that the seven liberal arts correspond to the seven pillars supporting Solomon's Temple of

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<sup>89</sup> II 529A

<sup>90</sup> "The arts became the bedrock of Carolingian schooling, the foundation that some students used to mount to the highest study of all, the study of the wisdom and mystery of Scripture." J.J. Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe" in Richard E. Sullivan (ed.), *The Gentle Voices of Teachers: Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age*, (Ohio, 1995) p. 118. Contreni must have in mind here Alcuin's recommendation in the *De vera philosophia* that the liberal arts should be studied not for their own sake but rather as the stages in an ascent *ad culmina Sanctarum Scripturarum* (PL 101 854A).

<sup>91</sup> In the *De Ordine* Augustine discusses the value of the liberal arts in the practice of theology. A man, he claims, can be virtuous but, *nesciens tamen, quid sit nihil, quid informis materia, quid formatum exanime, quid corpus, quid species in corpus, quid locus, quid tempus, quid in loco, quid in tempore, quid motus secundum locum, quid motus non secundum motum, quid stabilis motus, quid sit aevum, quid sit nec in loco esse nec nusquam, quid sit praeter tempus et semper, quid sit et nusquam esse et numquam non esse et numquam esse et numquam non esse, quisquis ergo ista nesciens, non dico summo illo deo, qui scitur melius nesciendo, sed de anima ipsa sua quaerere ac disputare voluerit, tantum errabit, quantum errari plurimum potest... Cum enim artes illae omnes liberales partim ad usum vitae partim ad cognitionem rerum contemplatione discantur. De Ordine 2.16.44, ed. W. M. Green, CCSL 29 p.131*

<sup>92</sup> See Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p.xi and p. 40: "Martianus' allegorical work was undoubtedly the most popular compendium of the liberal arts in the middle ages." See also Liebeschütz, H., "The Place of the Martianus *Glossae* in the Development of Eriugena's Thought", O' Meara, J. J. and Bieler, L. (eds.) *The Mind of Eriugena* (Dublin, 1973) pp. 49-58.



Alcuin's teachings, and those of Candidus Wizo, the pupil either of Alcuin himself or of Hrabanus Maurus, became popular in the second half of the ninth century as the *Dicta Albini* and the *Dicta Candidi*. Both the *Dicta* employ logic in the analysis of doctrine and scripture: the Trinity, Christ's dual nature and the existence of God. The texts were widely distributed throughout the ninth century.<sup>94</sup> Sets of glosses on Aristotle's *Categories* were being produced, especially at the school of Auxerre, and employed as tools in the unpicking of knotty theological problems. In a letter, Alcuin asks a nun whose dialectical acuity he praises, to examine fifteen *interrogationes* by which he hopes to prove the Adoptionist position absurd and to 'demonstrate' according to accepted logical rules, that Christ is fully God.<sup>95</sup> And at the time of the *Periphyseon*'s composition in the early 860s Gottschalk of Orbais and Hincmar of Reims were embroiled in a heated exchange over the appropriateness of singular and plural nouns used in reference to the Trinity or Unity of God.<sup>96</sup>

This tendency towards incorporating the liberal arts, and particularly logic and dialectic into the metaphysical and theological programme was, as we have already seen with the quoted passage from the *De Ordine* (n.91 above), endorsed by St.

<sup>93</sup> PL 101 853B-C. The dialogue-form *De vera philosophia* is usually considered to be the short introduction to Alcuin's *De grammatica* and this is how it is presented in the PL edition. For the symbolic connection between the liberal arts and the pillars of Solomon's temple (Prov. 9:1) see Cassiodorus, *De artibus ac disciplinibus liberalium litterarum* (PL 70 1149D).

<sup>94</sup> For the texts of the *Dicta Albini* and the *Dicta Candidi* see Appendix One: Texts from the Circle of Alcuin in Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre* (Cambridge, 1981) pp. 144-170; on the question of the authorship of the *Dicta* Marenbon has this to say: "None of the various arguments which have been brought against Alcuin's authorship of the *Dicta Albini* or Candidus' authorship of the *Dicta Candidi* are...compelling. There is no good reason to doubt the attributions..." *op. cit.* p.37

<sup>95</sup> *Alcuini Epistolae* no.204 in MGH *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II (Munich, 1978) p.339.30: *Interrogandum est, si aliquid adorandum nobis sit aut colendum, nisi verus Deus. Si dicit non esse, inferendum est: quomodo adorabis filium virginis, si non est verus Deus? His ita confirmatis per interrogationes et responsiones, quid superest, nisi Christus Iesus verus credatur Deus? Verus et plenus et unus credatur filius? Proprius et perfectus adoretur et laudetur ab omni creatura?*

<sup>96</sup> See Marcia Colish, "Carolingian Debates over *Nihil* and *Tenebrae*: A Study in Theological Method" in *Speculum* 59/4 (1984) pp.757-795 esp. p. 787.



Augustine himself.<sup>97</sup> Clearly, therefore, by the time of Eriugena's writing the *Periphyseon* dialectic was being used to render tractable certain problems arising within the ambit of speculative theology.

For Eriugena the causal process of remaining, procession and return is articulated by means of dialectic. Indeed, the central metaphysical structure of the *Periphyseon* – the divisions of nature – can be seen as a novel means of articulating the Neoplatonic emanationist theory.<sup>98</sup> By means of, “that science which the philosophers call ἀναλύτικη”<sup>99</sup> it is possible to resolve individuals into their species, species into their genera, and ultimately the genera into the primordial causes that subsist in the Word.

By means of this resolution or analysis one and the same thing can be analysed *qua* cause or *qua* effect. And these twin analyses will yield different, perhaps contradictory, conclusions concerning the thing analysed, although these conclusions are both valid.

For although between the obscurity of the causes and the brightness of the effects a division and a difference is understood, yet it is one and the same day, that is they have one meaning. For it is not understood that one creature is made in the causes, another in the effects of the causes, but one and same is made, in the eternal reasons as though in a darkness of the wisdom most secret and removed from every intellect, and subject to intellects in the processions of the reasons into their effects, as though revealed in a day of perfect knowledge.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> As a further example of the importance of the liberal arts in Augustine see *De doctrina christiana* II, 16, 25, CCSL XXXII p.50: *numerorum etiam imperitia multa facit non intellegi translate ac mystice posita in scripturis*.

<sup>98</sup> Cappuyns claims that, “les explications d’Erigène sur les quatre << espèces de natures >> nous montrent qu’en réalité ce qui se cache sous ces formules ingénieuses n’est rien d’autre que le double schéma des neo-platoniciens : la *processio* de la cause aux causes, et jusqu’aux effets ; puis la *reversio* de ceux-ci, par celles-la, jusqu’ à la cause .” Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène* (1933; reprint ed., Brussels: Editions Culture et Civilisation, 1964) p. 310

<sup>99</sup> II 526A

<sup>100</sup> III 693B: *quamvis enim inter obscuritatem causarum et claritatem effectuum divisio intelligatur ac differentia, unus tamen idemque dies est, hoc est unus eorum intellectus. Non enim alia creatura intelligitur in causis facta, alia in effectibus causarum condita, sed una eademque in rationibus aeternis veluti in quibusdam tenebris secretissimae sapientiae omnique intellectu remotae facta et in processionibus rationum in effectus intellectibus succumbens veluti in quadam die perfectae notitiae manifestata*.



The duality of cause and effect is really no more than a function of our limited reasoning capacity; the truth for Eriugena is much more ‘dynamic’ than our understanding will allow us to comprehend.<sup>101</sup> Creation looks dual, “as a consequence of the double direction of our contemplation,”<sup>102</sup> but in reality, “all the things that are are nothing else, in so far as they are, but the participation in Him who alone subsists from and through Himself”<sup>103</sup>

### Conclusion:

It is now possible to see how Eriugena intends,

C1     The quantum fulfils the conditions we stipulated for a material substrate,

and

C2     The quantum, *qua* caused cause (Quantity), is immaterial and can therefore consistently be adopted as an element in an immaterialist theory of corporeal substance,

to be rendered consistent.

According to a dialectical understanding of causation, there is no substantive difference between C1 and C2; the difference expressed in the two formulae is a reflection in our understanding of the underlying dynamic structure of reality; or perhaps *vice versa*, it is a reflection in reality of our dialectical intellection.

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<sup>101</sup> Gersh suggests that Eriugena’s Greek Neoplatonic sources see reality as, “a continuous series of causes and effects in which each term is related dynamically to the previous one: it ‘remains’ in its prior (manifests an element of identity with it), it ‘proceeds’ (manifests an element of difference), and ‘returns’ (strives to re-establish identity)” Gersh, Stephen, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1975) p. 125.

<sup>102</sup> II 527B: *propter duplicem nostrae contemplationis intentionem*. See also II 528A: *in ipsa rerum creaturam natura... in qua causae ab effectibus separantur et effectus causis adunantur quoniam in uno genere, in creatura dico, unum sunt*.

<sup>103</sup> II 528B



In the first place, body is cognised as a compound of immaterial qualities; this is body viewed, as it were, in its causes, all of which are incorporeal. In the second place body is defined in terms of its visible effects – a quantum invested by QFs and a single SF. But with a dialectical understanding of causation it is now possible to see that C1 and C2 are actually resolvable under the same general description. C1 defines body in terms of its immaterial causes. C2 defines body according to the effects of those causes. But since an effect both proceeds from and remains in its cause it is quite legitimate to speak of the same body as being material *and* immaterial. The ‘confusion’ detected by modern interpreters of Eriugena’s theory is thus not a confusion at all, but a function of his use of dialectics in analysing the the nature of the relationship between Creator and creation.

So is Eriugena an immaterialist or a materialist? In the sense that both C1 and C2 are valid conclusions to draw from his theory of material substance he is both. It is the case, however, that Eriugena clearly wishes to endorse C2 as the ‘correct’ or preferable option. The different values accorded to C1 and C2 shall become apparent when we come to examine Eriugena’s interpretation of the doctrines of the Fall and the general Resurrection. The world is sensible and complex and material (C1) inasmuch as humanity has fallen away from its original created nature. The Materialist Theory explains how and why the world appears as it does to us. Since, as we shall see, the Fall is essentially a fall into falsehood and unreality, it is only a step in the dialectic towards the Immaterialist Theory that is Eriugena’s ultimate analysis.

#### **IV : Two Objections**

Let the above conclusion represent the resolution of the apparently inconsistent theories of body and material substance in the *Periphyseon*.

Before testing the dialectical theory of body in the theological contexts of Fall and Resurrection, it is necessary first to address two non-theological difficulties that appear to arise as a result of the adoption of this model of corporeality.

i) Individuation:

The problem of individuation in the *Periphyseon* arises out of two closely related elements of Eriugena's metaphysics. Firstly, from his view that an effect continues to subsist in its cause, a species continues to subsist in its genus. The species subsists along with all the other species of the genus in a perfectly simple single substance. The related difficulty has a theological motivation – the Return of all things to God. The Return shall be the subject of Chapter Four but it must be touched upon here since it is conceived by Eriugena as a process of simplification, of the stripping away of qualitative and quantitative difference towards unification. And yet, again for theological or rather doctrinal reasons, Eriugena cannot admit that this process of unification consists in a reduction in the number of individual substances or in the elimination of individuals as such. Clearly the notion of the Return has implications for whatever we might wish to say about individuation. Both aspects of the problem are expressed in the following passage:

For those things which in the processions of natures appear (*videntur*) to be divided and partitioned into many are in the primordial causes unified and one, and to this unity they will return and in it they will eternally and immutably remain.<sup>104</sup>

Our reasons for requiring a principle whereby individuals are distinguishable one from the other are grounded in our antecedent beliefs that there are as a matter of fact individuals. Note that the passage quoted above from Book II seems to suggest

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<sup>104</sup> II 527A: *nam quae in processionibus naturarum multipliciter divisa atque partita esse videntur, in primordialibus causis unita atque unum sunt, ad quam unitatem reversura in ea aeternaliter atque immutabiliter manebunt.*



that individuality, and the difference that gives rise to it, is no more than an appearance. If, for Eriugena, there are no individuals, then it clearly follows that any principle of individuation is superfluous to his requirements. Let it be assumed, however, that Eriugena is actually committed to the view that there are as a matter of fact individuals. This commitment is clearly predicated upon certain theological presuppositions:

The natures of the visible things were established all together and at once for their own times and places, and in no case did the generation of any one of them into forms and species, quantities and qualities, precede by temporal intervals the generation of any other, but that they proceeded simultaneously, each according to its genus and species and indivisible particulars, from their eternal reasons in which they subsist as essences in the Word of God.<sup>105</sup>

Although the procession is simultaneous, there is no sense in which the procession is somehow unreal, that the natures of the visible things do not exist as much as the species and genera. With this assumption made, let us proceed to an examination of individuals.

It has already been shown that an individual body consists in an agglomeration of QFs in conjunction with a quantum investing an essence or SF. The question here, however, is where in this formula is the locus of individuality? Let us list a few preliminary possibilities. It cannot be the matter or quantum because that is utterly devoid of any distinguishing characteristics; it is formless (recall that we removed quantity and quanta from our definition of QF). Nor can it be the SF since

in all it is one and the same and in all it is equally whole, and in none does it admit any variation and dissimilarity.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> III 699AB

<sup>106</sup> III 703AB: *in omnibus una eademque est et in omnibus tota aequaliter, in nullis ullam varietatem vel dissimilitudinem recipiens.*



Furthermore, SF is simple,<sup>107</sup> incorruptible,<sup>108</sup> incorporeal and imperceptible.<sup>109</sup> So it must be the QFs that account for individuation, and individual difference.<sup>110</sup> Eriugena seems to endorse this view when he claims that

the dissimilarity of men one from another in feature, size, and quality of their several bodies, and the variety of custom and conduct result not from human nature (*humana natura*), which is one and the same in all in whom it exists, and is always most like itself and admits of no variety, but from the things which are understood about it (*ex omnibus quae circa substantiam intelliguntur*), namely from places and times, from generation, from quantity and quality of their diets, their habitats, the conditions under which each is born, and, to speak generally, from all things which are understood about the substance and are not the substance itself.<sup>111</sup>

In this passage Eriugena identifies human nature – a specific substance – with the SF of all individual human beings. Understood around (*circa*) this SF are arrayed all the QFs that account for the sensible differences between individual human beings.

So *prima facie* our initial conclusion appears correct, it is by means of the QFs that individuation is effected. Since *substantially* all things are identical it follows that, apart from accidents they are not individually distinct. And that it is through the variety of accidents that individuality appears in the world.

In Book III the Nutritor wishes to convince his pupil that all things are both eternal and made, eternal inasmuch as all things subsist substantially in their eternal primordial causes, made inasmuch as they become manifest to the senses *at a time* through the attachment of accidents.

So it [viz a substantial nature] somehow comes to be, not in respect of its subsistence in the primordial causes but in respect of receiving from temporal causes – now, by temporal causes I mean qualities and quantities and the other things which in time through generation attach themselves to substances as accidents.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> I 490A

<sup>108</sup> I 491A

<sup>109</sup> I 478D

<sup>110</sup> See Garcia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*, (Catholic University Press of America: Munchen, Wien, 1984) pp. 129-135. Garcia argues that for Eriugena, “it is only through the variety of accidents that individuality appears to the world.”

<sup>111</sup> III 703BC

<sup>112</sup> III 665D; III 657C



On the evidence of the two above quoted passages it seems to be the case, therefore, that Eriugena believes individuality simply to be an expression of accidental difference.

There are, however, two problems with the view that the ontological status of the individual *qua* individual depends upon accidental difference. The first problem Garcia recognises, the second he does not.

The accidental differences by means of which individuals are individuated are themselves universals.

All accidents are themselves universal. The black that colors Socrates' hair and the one that colors Plato's are one and the same. Eriugena does not explicitly specify how, if this is the case, we can still speak of Socrates' hair color as opposed to Plato's.<sup>113</sup>

Individuals – such as Socrates and Plato – are, in fact, bundles of universals. And according to Garcia, they are to be individuated by means of spatio-temporal location. Eriugena certainly accords space and time a prime importance in the picking out of discrete bodies.

Place is simply the natural definition of each creature, within which it is wholly contained and beyond which it by no means extends: and from this it is given to understand that whether one call it place or limit or term or definition or circumscription one and the same thing is being denoted, namely the confine of a finite creature.<sup>114</sup>

Eriugena must accept it as somehow axiomatic that no two bodies can at the same time occupy the same physical space. Socrates' black hair colour, and Plato's black

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<sup>113</sup> Garcia, *op. cit.* p.131

<sup>114</sup> I 483C. Cf. I 489A: *non enim ulla creatura certo suo loco atque immutabili certisque temporum spatiis finibusque, sive corporea sit sive incorporea, potest carere, ideoque, ut saepe diximus, duo haec, locus profecto et tempus, a philosophis ὧν ἄνευ, appellantur, hoc est quibus sine; nam sine his nulla creatura generatione inchoans et aliquo modo subsistens potest consistere.* For place and time in Eriugena see M. Cristiani, "Lo Spazio e il Tempo nell' opera dell' Eriugena" *Studi Medievali* 3a serie, 14 (1973) pp. 39-136; Moran, Dermot, "Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*. An Examination of Eriugena's Understanding of the Physical World," O' Rourke (ed.) *At the Heart of the Real. Philosophical Essays in Honour of the Most Reverend Desmond Connell Archbishop of Dublin* (Irish Academic Press, 1992) pp. 67-96 esp. pp.89-96; See also Marenbon, "John Scottus and the *Categoriae Decem*," *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West* (Variorum, 2000) V. pp.131-133.



hair colour are *individual* patches of colour because they are spatially discrete. And this is the case even though black is a universal. Underlying this notion is a theory of the non-identity of indiscernibles.<sup>115</sup>

But there is another problem that does seem to militate against Garcia's view that for Eriugena individuals are individuals in virtue of their accidental differences.

Let us look again at the passage from Book III:

The dissimilarity of men one from another... results not from human nature, which is one and the same in all whom it exists... but from the things understood about it [viz substantial human nature.]<sup>116</sup>

Eriugena does not here make the claim that individuals are individual only because they are qualitatively different from one another; they may be dissimilar, but that is not to say that their individuality is somehow a function of that dissimilarity, as Garcia seems to believe. Although human nature is one and the same, admits of no variety or change, and so on, it clearly is instantiated in every human. This is the substantial form (SF) human and these SFs are *individual*. It does not follow from the statement quoted, therefore, that, were SFs stripped of their qualitative differences, the individuals would cease to exist. And indeed Eriugena has good grounds for denying any such claim since later he is going to insist that individuals continue to subsist even after the matter and sensible forms (QFs) have all passed away.

The unformed matter which was created out of nothing and from which the structure of this sensible world, by the diversity of the forms impressed upon it, is composed: this matter he shall burn up like hay, when it shall be sanctified, that is purged, in that nature that was made in the Image of God, so that nothing material or earthly or visible or transitory or mutable shall remain in it for it shall be totally changed into spiritual stability and oneness.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> In fact the argument resembles a thought experiment devised by Max Black in which we are asked to imagine a universe consisting solely of two iron globes. These globes are identical in every conceivable respect – including relational properties. Black concludes, on the basis of the experiment, that it is not logically impossible for there to exist *two* qualitatively indiscernible things. In other words qualitative indiscernibility does not entail identity. Max Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles," *Mind* LXI, 242 (April 1952) pp. 156ff. The argument against the identity of indiscernibles goes back at least as far as Kant. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 263f = B319f.

<sup>116</sup> III 703B

<sup>117</sup> V 960D



At the general Resurrection, when only simple and uncompounded reasons continue to subsist in the Word of God, then, “all things are one, and not distinguished by accidents.”<sup>118</sup> Although things are not distinguished by accidents, they remain nonetheless individuals. Thus he is able to claim that even in this unified state the individuals retain their own subsistence and property (*unaquaeque proprietatem suam et subsistentiam*).<sup>119</sup>

It is now possible to show that, contrary to Garcia’s conclusion, an individual is not an individual in virtue of accidental differences such as spatio-temporal location. We have already noted in the last chapter Eriugena’s peculiar identification of subject and predicate; since this identification has an obvious bearing on the present discussion it is necessary to cite the passage in full.

For according to the opinion of the dialecticians everything that is is either a subject, or what is predicated of a subject, or what is in a subject, or what is predicated of and is in a subject. But if right reason is consulted it replies that ‘subject’ and ‘what is predicated of a subject’ are one, and differ in no respect. For if, as they say, ‘Cicero’ is a subject and first substance, while ‘man’ is predicated of the subject and second substance, what difference in regard of nature (*iuxta naturam*) is there except that one is in the individual while the other is in the species, since species is nothing else but the unity of the individuals and number nothing else but the plurality of the species? If then the species is total and one and indivisible in the individuals and the individuals are an indivisible unity in the species, what difference there is in respect of nature (*quae quantum ad naturam distantia*) between ‘subject’ and ‘what is predicated of a subject’ I do not see.<sup>120</sup>

Eriugena expresses here the view that to say ‘Cicero is a man’ is to specify Cicero substantially, that is, to say that Cicero belongs to the species ‘Man.’ As we have already seen, species and SF are identical so ‘Cicero belongs to the species Man’ and ‘Cicero has the SF Man’ are synonymous statements. With this established, Eriugena goes on to claim that there is no difference, “in regard of nature” between Cicero and

<sup>118</sup> V 906A: *omnia unum sunt, neque ullis accidentibus discernuntur.*

<sup>119</sup> V 879A

<sup>120</sup> I 470D – 471A



his SF. This *iuxta naturam* is crucial. The ‘nature’ refers to that nature in which all men were originally created.<sup>121</sup> It follows, therefore, that within the overall metaphysical context of the *Periphyseon*, the *prima facie* peculiar claim that subject and predicate are identical, is in fact trivial. Eriugena is simply claiming that Cicero is identical to his substance. Cicero *qua* individual is patently not to be identified with the accidental differences that invest his substantial form. To individuate Cicero in this way is a result of our fallen nature.<sup>122</sup>

In conclusion, an individual for Eriugena is individual because of its having a certain non-qualitative thisness. This thisness is a function of the individual’s substance, or maybe it is the substance itself; Eriugena is unclear. In other words, Eriugena need not accept the possibility of non-identity relations obtaining between qualitatively indiscernible things since for him the locus of individuality is not in the suchnesses presented by a given thing, but in that thing’s primitive thisness.<sup>123</sup>

Although it does not follow that the individuality of a composite sensible body, is identical to its substance, it does follow that were it not for the presence of a SF, there would be no individual.

Now that we have reached an understanding as to the ontological status of an Eriugenian individual it remains to be shown how individuation is possible. After all, if Cicero is, according to created nature, identical to Man, how is it possible, once all the accidental differences, forms and matter, are stripped away, to individuate him? Eriugena is making the implausible claim that all bodies are substantially identical, and yet individuals. And he offers no guidance on this matter anywhere in the

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<sup>121</sup> I 445A; IV 760B *et passim*.

<sup>122</sup> IV 855A: *postquam vero peccavit, per organa exterioris sensus non nisi solas sensibilibus superficies, et quantitates, et qualitates, situs quoque et habitudines, caeteraque quae corporeo sensui succumbunt, animus percipit.*

<sup>123</sup> For primitive thisness, see Robert Merrihew Adams, “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity,” *Journal of Philosophy* LXXVI, 1 (January 1979) pp. 5-26.



*Periphyseon*. At points he appears to express the view that individuation is impossible both before the Fall and at the fulfilment of the Return:

In the one [that is, before the Fall] he receives the knowledge in a general manner and secretly in the causes, in the other [that is, after the Fall] he receives it in a special manner and openly in the effects. For in that primordial and general creation of all human nature no one knows himself as species nor begins to have a particular knowledge of himself, for there is one general and common knowledge of himself, for there there is one general and common knowledge possessed by all, known only to God. There all men are one, and that one is made in the image of God, in Whom all were created.<sup>124</sup>

Individuation is, for Eriugena, a form of definition. It is therefore impossible to individuate that which by its nature lacks definition. God does not lack definition, he transcends it. Unformed matter does lack definition and it too cannot be individuated as a result. Likewise,

no wise man asks of all essence in general what it is, since it cannot be defined except in terms of the circumstances which circumscribe it, so to speak, within limits, I mean place and time, quantity and quality, connection, rest, motion, condition and the other accidents by which the substance itself, by reason of being subject, unknown and indefinable through itself, is shown only as subsisting, but not as to what it is.<sup>125</sup>

It is not the generality of this essence that leads the wise man to conclude that it cannot be defined as to what it is, it is, rather, the transcendent nature of the essence.

For Eriugena the essence of all things is identical to God's understanding of all things:

For the understanding of all things in God is the essence of all things because with God it is one and the same thing to know before they are made the things which He makes, and to make the things which He knows. God's knowing and God's making are therefore one. For by knowing He makes and by making He knows.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> IV 776D – 777A

<sup>125</sup> II 586D – 587A

<sup>126</sup> II 559AB Cf. I 516C; II 596B; III 632D; III 659A-B; III 671B; III 676D; III 681D; III 683A; III 684Cff; IV 768B; IV 770C; IV 772B; IV 778B – IV 779A



It seems to follow from this view that an individual's status as an individual depends on God's knowledge of the individual as such. It certainly cannot depend on our essential knowledge, since we have none:

The concept (*notio*) of man in the Mind of God is... simple and cannot be called by this or that name, for it stands above all definition and all groupings of parts, for it can only be predicated of it that it is, not what it is.<sup>127</sup>

It appears, therefore, that although we can abandon the view that Eriugena conceives of individuation as being effected by means of qualitative difference, we can replace this view only with the ultimately mysterious notion of God's knowledge of individuals bringing about their existence.

## ii) Visibility:

Visibility presents a problem for Eriugena, or for an interpreter of the *Periphyseon*, because while he claims that, "bodies, if not perceived by the senses, are not bodies"<sup>128</sup> he also argues that, "there are such things as bodies without sensible form."<sup>129</sup> These two statements appear to be contradictory; the first statement makes it clear that there are no bodies that cannot be perceived by the senses, but the second sentence asserts the existence of bodies that lack sensible form and are therefore unavailable to the senses. The second sentence therefore allows for the existence of a class of invisible bodies that the first statement denies.

By way of a conclusion to the first part of this analysis of body and material substance, it is the aim of this section to show how these superficially contradictory statements can be shown to be consistent with one another when couched within the

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<sup>127</sup> IV 768C

<sup>128</sup> I 479A: *corpora vero si sensibus non percipiuntur corpora non sunt*. Thus, for Eriugena, those who *futurae beatitudinis participes sunt* (I 483A) shall transcend their own corporeal nature. He explains this transcendence as follows: *hoc est naturam transcendere: naturam non apparere* (I 483B). It is of our nature to be manifest, visible. Indeed creation, for Eriugena, just is manifestation or self-manifestation. See I 455B.

<sup>129</sup> V 896D: *sunt corpora formis sensibilibus carentia*.



notion, developed over these two chapters, of body grouped intellectually or dialectically.

According to the first view a body, in order to be a body, must be available to the senses of a perceiver. This account of body falls within Eriugena's extended discussion of the categories at the point where the Nutritor is attempting to demonstrate to his pupil the distinction between body and place. The two are categorically distinct on account of body belonging to the genus Quantity.

Quantity is nothing else but the definite measuring out of parts which are separated either by the reason alone or by natural differentiation, and the rational extension to definite limits of those things which extend in the dimensions of nature, I mean in length, in breadth, and in depth.<sup>130</sup>

Whereas Place is

nothing else but the boundary and enclosure of things which are contained within a fixed limit.<sup>131</sup>

It follows, the Nutritor argues, that the world is not a place, but a body. The Alumnus is confused as to why this world should not be called a place since many things are placed within it. The Nutritor now aims to prove his case by arguing that Aristotle's ten categories can be divided into two groups, the first group being those categories (viz Quantity, Quality, Situation and Condition) that come together to form visible matter (*materiem visibilem*) through their marvellous commingling (*mirabili... coitu*).<sup>132</sup> The second group comprises those of the categories (viz *Ousia*, Relation, Place, Time, Action, Passion) that are never reached by the bodily sense. If Place belongs to that group that is never perceivable, while Quantity, in virtue of its coming to be perceivable as body, belongs to the other group, it follows that place and body are not the same.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> I 478B

<sup>131</sup> I 478B

<sup>132</sup> I 479A

<sup>133</sup> I 479B: *aliud est igitur locus et aliud corpus*.

In this passage of Book I, therefore, the body under discussion is specifically *visible* body, or *visible* matter; were it not so, the Nutritor's categorial argument would not go through.

I am speaking here (*nunc*) of the bodies that are produced by the coming together of the four elements of the world.<sup>134</sup>

The use of *nunc*, seems to imply that there are other types of body about which it would be possible to speak at other times, and in other ways. Perhaps these 'other' bodies do not have to be perceivable to the senses in order to be bodies. It appears, therefore, that the problem with the statement, "a body in order to be a body must be perceivable to the senses," is the implied presence of a universal quantifier. In fact, however, the 'body' under discussion is not *all* bodies, but a discrete class of bodies.

And that this is the case is demonstrated almost straightaway. Having made the apparently normative claim concerning the necessary perceptibility of bodies, the Nutritor goes on to speak of the four elements that are themselves bodies but,

because of the indescribable fineness and purity of their nature, surpass all mortal sense.<sup>135</sup>

And in Book V Eriugena claims that

the four simple elements of the world are not bound to particular shapes. For they are in the world everywhere, and there is no part of it where their concourse is absent. But how can that which is in the world everywhere be confined to any form? There are such things, then, as bodies without sensible form.<sup>136</sup>

That which lacks sensible form (QF) is clearly unavailable to the senses. So here already is an exception to the rule that all bodies must be perceivable. It must be the case, therefore, that a certain class of bodies, in order to be bodies, must be

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<sup>134</sup> I 479A: *corpora nunc dico quae ex coitu quattuor mundi elementorum conficiuntur.*

<sup>135</sup> I 479B; cf. II 606C; III 711D-712A: *quattuor simplicium elementorum universitatem, quae dum per se purissima sint et incomprehensibilia omni corporeo sensu et ubique universaliter diffusa.*

<sup>136</sup> V 896D



perceivable to the senses. But there are other classes of bodies, for example the four elements, that are both imperceptible and bodies.

Having thus drawn the sting of the first statement, let us turn to examine the claim that there are such things as bodies without sensible form. What is a body without a sensible form? The definitions of body that opened the first part of this study were all more or less complex: a body consists in matter and form; a body is an agglomeration of sensible qualities; a body is composed of the qualities of the elements. What these definitions had in common was the qualitative form (QF). The claim that there are bodies without sensible form (QF) contradicts this claim. But only if 'body' is a term that refers to a single class of objects that are identical in certain relevant ways. In the light of the above findings, however, it appears that 'body' ranges over a number of classes of objects that differ from one another at least in that some are visible and some are not. Why, therefore, should it not be possible for there to exist a class of bodies that lack QFs? Is it the case, therefore, that Eriugena posits two classes of bodies, those that are sensible, and those that are not?

Interestingly, Eriugena does not want to adopt the view that there are two types or classes of bodies, or that the class of bodies comprises a number of different types. For him 'body' denotes a singular class of objects. There is only one type of body – that which is a species of Quantity; to have a body is to have spatial extension. The difference, once again, lies in the epistemological focus of the perceiver – whether they remain in thrall to material effects or have chosen to contemplate the substantial nature of creation:

In every sensible body we have one way of regarding with the corporeal senses the mass of its quantity which forms the base of its qualities, another of



understanding with the keen mind its invisible substance and the proper species that subsist in it.<sup>137</sup>

The ‘invisible substance’ in this passage is the invisible substance that was analysed in Chapter One and which we have now identified as the locus of individuality. And the ‘proper species that subsist in it’ are the specific substances from which it proceeds (Man, Creature etc) and which are present wholly and immutably in each individual substance.

There are two possible ways of perceiving sensible body. Firstly, there is the corporeal sense which perceives an agglomeration of quanta and qualia, and then there is the understanding of the keen mind which is able to penetrate to the body’s individual substance; this substance is identical to the species.

It is now possible to conclude this first part of the study of material substance in the *Periphyseon*. These two modes of understanding material substance mark out the metaphysical spectrum upon which the perceiver must align him or herself. And, of course, this epistemological alignment has certain entailments. To engage the understanding in contemplation of created material *substance* is to look towards the primordial causes, the Good in which all things are made; it is to initiate the Return and to counteract the effects of the Fall. It is to turn towards reality and away from the mutable, transient unreality of the material world. To turn away from the substance and allow the sensory apparatus to rest on the qualities of sensible bodies is to be beguiled by false phantasies, to turn away from the Good, and from God.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> III 711C: *aliter nanque in omni sensibili corpore quantitatis molem qualitatibus suis subiectam corporeis sensibus consideramus, aliter invisibilem substantiam speciesque proprias in ipsa subsistentes mentis acie intelligimus – secundum quas rerum omnium visibilium et invisibilium numerositas multiplicatur, universalitas colligitur, proprietas custoditur.*

<sup>138</sup> On phantasia in Eriugena see Foussard, J-C., “Apparence et Apparition: La Notion de Phantasia chez Jean Scot,” Roques (ed.) *Jean Scot Erigene et L’Histoire de la Philosophie* (Paris CNRS, 1977) pp. 337-348.



Paradoxically, for Eriugena therefore, visibility is obscurity. An object's visibility is an index of the fallen, benighted natures of both the perceived and the perceiver; it represents a failure on the part of the perceiver to deploy correctly his or her faculties, and ultimately this is a failure of the will.

This paradox – that visibility is obscurity – is itself a call to asceticism. Expressed by means of this paradox is Eriugena's fundamental belief that the sensible, transient, corruptible world, is not the proper object of the human intellect; it is ultimately false. In order to attain the truth, the eye of the mind must be turned away from the sensible and towards the immutable, eternal substance of all things.



## PART TWO

### Introduction

At the beginning of Book IV of the *Periphyseon* the Nutritor offers a warning to his pupil. Compared to the task now before them, he says, the first three books of the work

seem like a smooth sea upon which, because of the calmness of the waves, readers could sail without fear of shipwreck, steering a safe course. Now, however, we enter upon a voyage where the course has to be picked from the mass of tortuous digressions, where we have to climb the steeps of obscure doctrines, encounter the region of the Syrtes, that is to say, the dangers of the currents of unfamiliar teaching, ever in immediate danger of shipwreck from the obscurity of the subtlest intellects, which like concealed rocks may suddenly split our vessel.<sup>1</sup>

The changed state of the waters is a reflection of the shift from what we might call speculative philosophy to speculative theology. The last two books of the *Periphyseon* deal primarily with the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection. The dangers, as Eriugena perceives them, are therefore greater; to make a mistake in a discussion of the categories, or the primordial causes would be to fall into error, to make a mistake in explicating doctrine is heresy.

For this reason, Eriugena explicitly conceives his role as different from that of the natural philosopher of the first three books of the *Periphyseon*. In the final two books – but particularly in the fourth – he sees his role more as a purveyor of possible positions. To this end he presents the reader with a number of options, and frequently, once the positions have been cited, he urges the reader to choose between them:

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<sup>1</sup> IV 743D – 744A. Cf. *De Prae* 355B: *nos vero e diverso inter undosum velivomque pelagus imperii senioris nostri, domini videlicet gloriossimi Caroli, quasi quaedam navicula diversis fluctibus agitati*. For the use of navigation and nautical imagery in Eriugena see, Moran, “Wandering from the Path: Navigatio in the Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena” in *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies* (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1982) pp. 244-50. Eriugena uses this imagery at III 636A; V 923D – 924C.



We have made it our aim to say only those things which seem to us to be probable (*verisimilia*). To refute the opinion of others who think otherwise, or to treat it with contempt, or to pronounce it false, is none of our business.<sup>2</sup>

This position reflects not so much over-cautiousness on Eriugena's part as a sensitivity to the fact that the subject matter no longer admits of right or wrong under the lamp of cold reason, but the arguments must always be to probability, or likelihood, or that which accords best with a sensitive and rational reading of Scripture.

Although the focus of Eriugena's attention has shifted, his ultimate aim, I suggest, remains unchanged: to engage the reader in contemplation of substantial reality and thereby to facilitate the ascent to God. As we shall see over the course of what follows, this *contemplatio* is not conceived by Eriugena as the personal fulfilment of a religious vocation, but as the Resurrection itself. The doctrines of the Fall of Man, and the general Resurrection are, for Eriugena, not conceived as historical processes or events, but as a universal gauge upon which it is possible to read the endlessly dynamic relationship between Creator and Creation.

Our aim therefore is to show how Eriugena's dialectical theory of corporeal substance functions in the context of his metaphysical theology. It shall be found that Eriugena's thinking is essentially ascetical; he advocates withdrawal from the sensible world and the adoption of a life of contemplation. Indeed 'withdrawal' and 'contemplation' themselves are mapped onto the metaphysics as 'death' and 'resurrection'.

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<sup>2</sup> IV 813D-814A; see also IV 804: *mihi autem et tibi, si placet, sufficiat sententias sanctorum patrum de constitutione hominis ante peccatum legere, et quid unusquisque eorum voluit cauta et diligenti inquisitione quaerere. Lites autem inter eos constituere, non est nostrum, aut hunc constituere, hunc autem refellere, scientes post sanctos apostolos nullum apud graecos fuisse in expositiones divinae scripturae maioris auctoritatis Gregorio Theologo, nullum apud romanos Aurelio Augustino*. For Eriugena's hermeneutical method in relation to Augustine see B. Stock, "The Philosophical Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena," *Studi Medievali* ser. 3a, 8 (1967) pp. 1-57; Russell, R., "Some Augustinian Influences," in O' Meara and Bieler, L., (eds.), *The Mind of Eriugena* (Dublin, 1973). For Eriugena's hermeneutics in general see Van Riel, C., Steel, C., McEvoy, J. J., (eds.) *Johannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics* (Leuven, 1996).



The purpose of Part One was to reconcile several apparently inconsistent theories of corporeal substance. In Part Two we shall be obliged to ask how the findings of Part One can be squared with revealed doctrine. How is material substance, how are visible bodies, to be *evaluated* within the divine plan? Perhaps the aims of Part Two can best be summarised as follows: In Part One we asked of Eriugena, What is material substance? In Part Two we are asking precisely the same question but are no longer hoping for an answer as to its composition, but as to its place within the divine scheme.



## Chapter Three : The Fall

God's plan made a hopeful beginning,  
But Man spoilt his chances by sinning,  
We trust that the story,  
Will end in great glory,  
But at present the other side is winning.<sup>1</sup>

### Part One : The Fall

#### Introduction:

In this chapter an attempt shall be made to show that, although Eriugena conceives of matter and corporeal substance as base and low, he does not think of them as evil. It shall be noted that for Eriugena material substance and body are 'added' by God to created nature as punishment for sin. And this addition constitutes the Fall. It shall be necessary therefore to look in detail both at created human nature, human nature in its pristine, pre-lapsarian form, and at fallen human nature in an attempt to define as precisely as possible the effects of the Fall.

In the opening sections two contentious views will be discussed, firstly, that there is no doctrine of the Fall to be found in the *Periphyseon*, and secondly, that the Fall just is creation. Although it is possible to develop arguments for these two views, it shall be found that neither reflects Eriugena's intention. In conclusion I aim to show that the Fall for Eriugena serves a protreptic function; it is a guide to right living.

One further programmatic point: let it be a requirement that our findings concerning the doctrine of the Fall in the *Periphyseon* sit consistently with the conclusions of the first part of our analysis. As the Alumnus recognises, "every authority which is not upheld by true reason is seen to be weak."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional, *The Wordsworth Book of Limericks* (Wordsworth, 1997) p. 82

<sup>2</sup> I 513B

We are, therefore, following Eriugena's own normative stipulations if we enforce the rule that, however authoritative, that which does not admit of 'rational' proof – though it may have the weight of authority behind it – will not be allowed to stand. For our purposes that means that any definition of matter or body inconsistent with the conclusions of Part One will be inadmissible.

### I : The Fall

I behold man driven forth from Paradise; formerly blessed, now become wretched; once rich, now needy; once an eternal being, now a temporal; once enjoying everlasting life, now mortal; once wise, now foolish; once a spiritual creature, now an animal; once heavenly, now earthly; once enjoying eternal youth, now growing old; once happy, now sad; once saved, now lost; once the prudent son, now the prodigal; straying from the flock of the heavenly powers I behold him, and I grieve for him.<sup>3</sup>

The above is a typical expression of the extremes of the Fall to be found in the *Periphyseon* – the heights and the depths. Man's former state is contrasted with his present. Whereas the former 'created' state was blessed, eternal, intellectual and spiritual, the present state of man is characterised by corruption, animality and ignorance.

The Fall is often also expressed by Eriugena as a fall away from a likeness to God, a spoiling of the Image in which man was created. It is, "tarnished by a kind of unlikeness."<sup>4</sup> According to Eriugena, there are two types of difference between man created in the image of God, and the principal exemplar, the Word. Firstly, the Trinity subsists substantially through itself, while man's nature is made by and in the Word. This is the substantial difference, or the difference "in respect of subject" (*rationem subiecti*).<sup>5</sup> The second difference is explained by means of the doctrine of the Fall; it

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<sup>3</sup> V 862BC

<sup>4</sup> V 871D: *quadam disimilitudine propter peccatum decolorata est.*

<sup>5</sup> II 598B



is a dissimilarity between image and exemplar that does not come from nature, “but is an accident produced by sin.”<sup>6</sup> It is an examination of this accidental difference that concerns us in this chapter.

The first man is depicted as falling from

the delight of eternal bliss and the happiness of divine similitude, in His image and likeness, that is, in an image which in every way resembles Himself save only, as I have said before, in his status of subject – a nature which is greater and more excellent than the whole sensible universe, not in respect of size, but in respect of the dignity of its nature.<sup>7</sup>

The depths are thus characterised in terms of the marring of the Image, an unlikeness.

The Fall is also a forgetfulness of the original creation, an ignorance of God. This is the Fall characterised as an epistemic crisis:

Deceived and fallen, blinded by the murkiness of [sc. the soul’s] depraved will, she has forgotten herself and her Creator. And this is the most wretched feature of her death, and the deepest profundity of her submersion in the fog of ignorance, that she has drifted so far from herself and her Creator and approached in likeness so near and so shamefully the irrational and mortal animals.<sup>8</sup>

And this epistemic crisis has a number of metaphysical corollaries:

Sexual propagation in the manner of the irrational beasts; bodily increase and decrease; all the diseases to which the body is heir, including its final dissolution; also the irrational impulses to which the rational soul is subject, and which deriving from matter, revolve about it. None of these things are part of the primal creation of man, but originate from his general sin.<sup>9</sup>

Sexuality is characterised by Eriugena as the manifest product of man’s fallen nature:

God... superimposed upon human nature an alternative mode of propagation, by which this world might be extended in space and time to allow for man to pay for his general offence a general penalty, by being born like the rest of the animals from a corruptible seed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> II 598B

<sup>7</sup> IV 822AB

<sup>8</sup> IV 761A

<sup>9</sup> V 939D – 940A

<sup>10</sup> IV 799BC; see also V 893B where Eriugena explains that the division of humankind into male and female is the fifth and final division of all created nature.



This chapter aims to discern the role that material substance plays in this cosmic nose-dive from paradise into the mire.

For Eriugena the Fall acts as an explanation of how humanity comes to occupy a middle ground between creator and creation.

The whole soul [of man] is on the one hand produced from the earth in the genus of the animals, and on the other hand is made in the image of God.<sup>11</sup>

In his Homily on the Prologue of St. John's gospel Eriugena places man at the junction of the celestial and material worlds. In man, he claims, the spiritual and corporeal are joined and made one,

for he consists in both body and soul. Combining the body of this world with the soul of the other world, he makes one adornment. For body indeed is wholly corporeal, while soul possesses a wholly incorporeal nature.<sup>12</sup>

The characteristics of our fallen nature are generation through sexual means,<sup>13</sup> the impairing of our intellectual faculty,<sup>14</sup> and a resultant ignorance of God.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> IV 755A: *tota igitur et in genere animalium de terra producta est, et tota ad imaginem dei facta*. Cf. IV 795B (quoting Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* 17 [16] PG 44 181BC): *Duorum quorundam per extremitatem a se invicem distantium medium est humanitas, divinae videlicet incorporalisque naturae, et irrationalis pecudalisque vitae*. See also V 893C: *Hinc etiam medietas solet appellari [sc. homo], extrema siquidem longeque a se distantia, spiritualia scilicet et corporalia, in se comprehendit et in unitatem colligit, corpore et anima consistens*. See also IV 833C-834A: *Quomodo de limo terrae est formatus qui ad imaginem et similitudinem dei factus? Aut quomodo de eo diceretur: Factus homo in animam viventem? Quod de caeteris bestiis de terra prolatis similiter dictum est: Producat terra animam viventem. Nonne ergo duarum hominis conditionem ratio datur intelligi? Primo quidem scriptus est: Et creavit deus hominem ad imaginem suam, ad imaginem dei creavit illum. Ecce prima conditio, in qua nulla terreni limi commemoratio facta est, neque animae viventis. Sequitur autem secunda, quae ex divisione naturae in duplicem sexum, poena praevaricationis superaddita, exordium sumpsit: Masculum, inquit, et feminam creavit eos*.

<sup>12</sup> *Johanni Scotti Homilia in Prologum S. Evangelii secundum Johannem* (PL 122 294B – my translation): *corpore enim constat et anima. corpus de hoc mundo, animam de altero mundo colligens, unum facit ornatum. et corpus quidem omnem corpoream, anima vero omnem incorpoream possidet naturam*.

<sup>13</sup> IV 799B: *quapropter si homo non peccaret, nullus utriusque sexus copula*. See also IV 807D: *Haec autem sunt consequentia peccati, propter peccatum, priusquam fieret peccatum, ab eo cuius praescientia non fallitur, in homine et cum homine, veluti extra hominem ac superaddita: animale quidem corpus atque terrenum et corruptibile, sexus uterque ex masculo et femina bestiarum similitudine procreationis multiplicatio, indigentia cibi et potus indumentique, incrementa et detrimenta corporis, somni ac vigiliarium alterna inevitabilisque necessitas, et similia, quibus omnibus humana natura, si non peccaret, omnino libera maneret, quemadmodum libera futura est*. See also IV 761A; cf. II 532A in which the division of the sexes is characterised as the final division of nature. Also II 532B.

<sup>14</sup> IV 777CD: *casus quippe illius maximus et miserrimus erat scientiam et sapientiam sibi insitam deserere, et in profundam ignorantiam suimet et creatoris sui labi*.

<sup>15</sup> IV 744B: *veritatis contemplationem, quam lapsu primi hominis perdiderat*; IV 761A; IV 852A; IV 777CD.



But of most interest to us here is the possibility that Eriugena conceives the Fall as either 1) the explanation as to why we are corporeal beings, or 2) the cause of our corporeality.<sup>16</sup> Of course 1) and 2) are not mutually exclusive. The Fall could provide a causal account for material substance as well as act as a principle for explaining why the material world is the way that it is. In other words it is possible to think of 1) as providing an Aristotelian final cause, and 2) as an efficient cause.<sup>17</sup> As we shall see the doctrine of the Fall is essentially teleological in function; it is designed by God to punish man and ultimately to bring him back into a correct alignment with created nature. But there is, as shall become clear over the course of the following discussion, a particular problem with 2).

## II : Two Possibilities

If we accept that 2) is true – that the Fall is the cause of our corporeality – then we are immediately faced with two possibilities. Either it is arguable that Eriugena offers no doctrine of the Fall at all, or, if this seems unacceptable, it could be claimed that the Fall and the Creation are in fact one event.

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<sup>16</sup> That the Fall is the cause of our corporeality is Origen's view. See Origen, *On First Principles* II, 7, 3, ii: "The creation of all rational creatures consisted of minds bodiless and immaterial without any number or name, so that they all formed a unity by reason of the identity of their essence and power and energy and by their union with and knowledge of God the Word; but they were seized with weariness of the divine love and contemplation, and changed for the worse, each in proportion to his inclination in this direction; and they took bodies, either fine in substance or grosser, and became possessed of a name, which accounts for the differences of names as well as of bodies." See also, Origen, *On First Principles* II, 1, 3: "What other cause can we imagine to account for the great diversity of this world except the variety and diversity of the motions and declensions of those who fell away from that original unity and harmony in which they were at the first created by God." Trans. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles* (SPCK, 1936). Deidre Carabine accepts the Origenist reading of Eriugena: Carabine, *Eriugena*, (Oxford, 2000) p. 79: "The most important consequence of the fall is that it effected the creation of the body and the material world." This is also Dermot Moran's view, see Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* 2, 3, 29 – 35.



i) There is no Fall:

The argument that there is no doctrine of the Fall to be found in the *Periphyseon* depends on a number of passages in Book IV claiming that man's tenure of Paradise had no temporal extension. God foreknows that man will fall from the beauty and dignity of his original divine nature into animality.<sup>18</sup> To this end, Eriugena argues, God made man both in the Image of God, and in the genus animal *simultaneously*.

At the same time as He created man He created the consequences of his sin.<sup>19</sup> And if it appears precipitate on God's part to punish man *before* he has sinned, Eriugena immediately points out that to think so is in itself an indication of our sinful nature. He reminds us

that in God nothing is before and nothing after, because for Him there is nothing past, nor future, nor between past and future, for to Him all things are at once present. Why should He not then simultaneously create those things which He saw were to be created and willed to be created? For when we say 'before' and 'after' sin we are demonstrating the mutability of our thought processes which is due to the fact that we are still subject to temporal conditions: but to God the foreknowledge of sin and the consequence of sin itself were contemporaneous.<sup>20</sup>

This double creation of man – both in the Image, and in the genus Animal – has an exegetical impulse. It is an attempt to render consistent the two creations of man to be found in the Genesis text (Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:7). The dual creation of man shall be examined in greater detail later in the chapter. It suffices for our purposes here to show that, according to Eriugena, man is created *from the start* under the genus animal. The Fall, it follows, must be simultaneous with Creation.

The claim that man is in Paradise for no length of time finds support, Eriugena believes, in a passage from Luke's gospel. In the parable of the Good Samaritan there is the following verse:

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<sup>18</sup> IV 807B

<sup>19</sup> IV 807C: *peccati consequentia in homine et cum homine simul concreavit.*

<sup>20</sup> IV 808AB



A certain man was descending from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves. (Luc. 10:30)

Eriugena interprets this passage as allegorically referring to the Fall of man. He notes that the man, according to the parable, was already descending when he fell among thieves. Jerusalem is to be understood as referring to Paradise or the Vision of Peace, and Jericho to the, “weakness and instability of temporal nature.”<sup>21</sup> The man was not attacked *in* Jerusalem. He was already falling at the time he was tempted by the devil.

For it is not to be believed that the same man could both have been abiding in the contemplation of eternal peace and also have fallen at the persuasion of a woman corrupted by the poison of a serpent; or that that serpent, I mean the devil, who had already fallen from Paradise, that is, from the dignity of the angelic nature, could have prevailed over a man who was not yet in a state of sin and was not already falling from the sublimity of the Divine image.<sup>22</sup>

Eriugena reinforces his view that creation and Fall are simultaneous by pointing out that the devil is described as, “a man-slayer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Now, the Nutritor asks, from what beginning was the devil a man-slayer? Was it from the beginning of his own creation, or the beginning of man’s? And were man and the devil created at the same time? If the devil was created first, then he could not have been a man-slayer from the beginning of his creation since there was no man to slay. And if man was made first, how can the devil be a man-slayer from the beginning of the creation of man? If the devil and man were created simultaneously then it follows that the devil was slaying and man being slain from the first. And therefore, Eriugena asks, what time remains for man in Paradise?

But if there is no temporal space between creation and Fall how or why do we render the two distinct? Surely it would be neater to think simply of a single act of creation – an emanation, a procession of cause into effect, if the Neoplatonic language

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<sup>21</sup> IV 811C: *defectum instabilitatemque rerum temporalium*.

<sup>22</sup> IV 811CD



is to be retained – without recourse to any further ‘events’ or interventions such as the Fall to explain why the creation is as it is?

It might be neater, but neatness goes no way at all to show that the two events – Fall and Creation – are identical. For surely simultaneity does not imply identity.

Indeed despite the simultaneity, Eriugena continues to maintain the difference between man’s creation and his fall. And he does so by means of a counterfactual:

That praise of the life of man in Paradise must refer rather to the life that would have been his if he had remained obedient than to its happening which only began and in which he did not continue.<sup>23</sup>

ii) The Fall is identical to the Creation:

As we noted above, Origen’s assertion that the irrational movement of man’s created will is the *cause* of material reality seems to be inconsistent with Eriugena’s own view that

the wholesome doctrine of the Church most firmly believes and most clearly perceives that the one omnipotent God who is principle and cause of all things, of the things that are and the things that are not, endowed the world at the moment when He willed to do so with both matter and form.<sup>24</sup>

It seems that, for Eriugena, the act of Creation and the Fall of man must be entirely different events. One has a divine Cause, the other is a, “penalty which our nature must pay for its transgression.”<sup>25</sup>

And yet in a passage concerning the likeness of the human trinity (Intellect, Reason, Sense) with the Holy Trinity, the Nutritor argues that

the human intellect, through an act of knowing, creates, by a wonderful operation of its science (*mirabili quodam operatione scientiae*), whatsoever it most clearly and unambiguously receives from God.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> IV 809B

<sup>24</sup> V 890C; Cf. II 535BC; III 632D *et passim*. It goes counter to Eriugena’s thinking to claim that man is the *creative* cause of anything. After all, man belongs to that third species of the genus *natura* that Eriugena classifies as ‘created and un-creating.’ (I 441B-442A)

<sup>25</sup> IV 777AB

<sup>26</sup> II 579BC



And a little later he reiterates that

everything that our intellect can understand [concerning God and the causes of things] after a universal mode it creates [that is, it forms] by an act of science through knowledge in the reason; and after a particular mode, through the sense which is consubstantial with it, divides unconfusedly [that is, accomodates its knowledge to each (particular) by the most careful observation of distinctions] by the power of its contemplation into the individual definitions of the things which in the reason it gathers together.<sup>27</sup>

From this the Alumnus concludes that, “the trinity of our nature... creates the senses which are subjoined to it, and the instruments of the senses, and the whole of its body – I mean, this mortal body.”<sup>28</sup>

According to these passages there is no requirement for a fall in order to explain the diverse nature of reality or our having mortal bodies. Complexity, mortality and change are explicable by means of our own cognitive grasp of that which we, “most clearly and unambiguously receive from God.”

We cannot, however, on the basis of these passages, conclude that i) the Fall is a redundant concept in Eriugena, nor that ii) Eriugena is here unequivocally articulating the view that man creates, through cognition, the orders of reality. Let us take ii) first. Note that man’s act of creation is qualified in both quoted passages (II 579BC and II 580AB). Firstly, it does not create *simpliciter* but but by means of “a wonderful operation of its science.” Nor is this creation *ex nihilo*; it “creates”, or rather forms, what it receives from God; it is creation after the event. Likewise in the second passage (II 580AB) Eriugena has made several later insertions that markedly dilute the idealist tone. Creation is “forming”; rather than actually dividing, distributing that which it understands after a universal mode, it “accomodates its

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<sup>27</sup> II 580AB: *intellectum nostrum omnia quaecunque [de deo causisque rerum] potest intelligere universaliter in ratione per cognitionem actu scientiae creare [hoc est formare] et per sensum consubstantialem sibi particulariter in singularis rerum diffinitiones quas in ratione colligit contemplationis virtute inconfuse dividere [hoc est suam cognitionem unicuique cautissimo discretionis contuitu accomodare.]* Square brackets mark inserts to MS Rheims 875 in Eriugena’s own hand.

<sup>28</sup> II 580AB



knowledge” to prior distinctions. This is not so much creation as taxonomy. Or rather it is creation understood after a different fashion. Eriugena is careful to draw this distinction between the two modes of knowledge that bring about creation:

The knowledge in the Creative Wisdom is itself rightly held to be the primary and causal essence of the whole of creation, while the knowledge in the created nature is the secondary essence and subsists as the effect of the higher knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that since the secondary mode of creative knowledge subsists as an effect in the higher mode, there is, strictly speaking, only one knowledge and one creation – that of the higher causal mode. Eriugena sums up as follows:

Just as the understanding of all things which the Father made in His only begotten Word is their essence and is the substance of all those attributes which are understood to be attached by nature to that essence; so the knowledge of all things which the Word of the Father has created in the human soul is their essence and the substance of all those attributes which are discerned to be attached by nature to that essence; and just as the Divine intellect is prior to all things and is all things; so the intellectual knowledge of the soul is prior to all things which she knows and is all the things which she fore-knows.<sup>30</sup>

It is this secondary creation, the effect of the primary creation, that is of interest here.

It is tempting to identify this creation with the Fall. And yet, returning to passages under discussion from Book II, we find no mention of the Fall. Surely if the doctrine of the Fall is to explain a feature of reality it must be the mortal nature of the body, our susceptibility to death and corruption. The reason for this absence is perhaps contextual. In this section of Book II Eriugena is concerned to make clear the likeness of human nature to the Holy Trinity. And in another passage from Book IV he continues to fail to identify this ‘secondary’ or taxonomical creation with the Fall, or as arising as a result of the Fall.

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<sup>29</sup> IV 779AB: *de prima et causali essential in creatricis sapientiae notione constituta, deque secunda et effective, quae in anima humana subsistere non incongrue asseritur.*

<sup>30</sup> IV 779BC; for a detailed discussion of Eriugena’s idealism see, Moran, “Idealism in Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena”, *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999) pp. 53-82.



Whatsoever in human bodies is seen (*intelligitur*) to be immutable is proper to the first creation, but whatever in them is perceived (*percipitur*) to be mutable and variable, this has been added later, and subsists outside the body's true nature.<sup>31</sup>

Note, however, the difference in epistemic modes identified in this passage; the mode proper to substantial human nature is intellection; the mode proper to the non-substantial or lapsarian body is perception.

For either it [sc. our nature] explores by its rational and intellectual motions those things which its Creator created out of nothing, and deposits in the innermost recesses of its reason the things which by the clear observation of its intellect it gets to know in nature, and it either gathers together into a unity its cognitions of all the things it can know, (for instance, by the operation of its science it unifies genera in essence, species in genus, individuals in species); or it divides them into many, distributing each cognition (that is to say, to take the same example, dividing by a gnostic operation essence into genera, genus into species, species into individuals. And this is the principal and highest activity of the rational nature.<sup>32</sup>

According to Eriugena, therefore, it remains within the range of human capabilities to perform this dialectical, taxonomical function free from sin. It is, however, also possible to 'create' after this fashion in a sinful manner.

For, as our reason teaches us, this world would not have burst forth into a variety of both sensible and divers multiplicities of the parts if God had not foreseen the fall and ruin of the first man when he abandoned the unity of his nature.<sup>33</sup>

Note that although God foresees man's fall, He does not initiate it. Rather man's abandonment of his unity results in the bursting forth of sensible multiplicity. The Fall does not ultimately account for the metaphysical dichotomy: substance and accident, unity and diversity; nor does it express our epistemic relation to creation; the locus of

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<sup>31</sup> IV 801C: *quodcunque enim in humanis corporibus immutabile intelligitur, primae conditionis proprium est. quicquid vero in eis mutabile ac varium percipitur, illud est superadiectum, extraque naturam substitutum*. Note that O' Meara's translation goes further than Eriugena in claiming that the variable and mutable is outside of the true nature. There is no corresponding term in the Latin. Although it may ultimately be the case that for Eriugena *true* nature is simple and substantial rather than sensible and qualitative, the over-translation represents, at this stage in the dialectic, an unwarranted weighting towards immaterialism.

<sup>32</sup> II 581AB

<sup>33</sup> II 540A



the Fall is in our *attitude* to creation, whether or not we *choose* intellection over perception.

These two creative possibilities – epistemic motions to simplicity or diversity – are a way of expressing the moral choice that faces man.

Rather than straightforwardly identify the Fall of man with the creation of the material world (as Origen does) Eriugena offers a more complex model of creation as moral choice.

### III : Matter and Evil

The Fall is *about* evil. Partly (perhaps primarily) it is designed to answer the questions: *why* is there evil, and why does God allow it. But also, *what* is it? What is to be included in the class of evil things? Of particular interest here are matter and body. Are they evil? Or are they punishment for man's having been evil?

The Fall, the expulsion from Paradise, is essentially a theodicy. It is an attempt to render consistent the following statements: a) The Creation is solely the work of an omnipotent and perfectly benevolent Creator, and b) Creation is imperfect and contains evil. That b) is a brute fact about the nature of the world seems incontestable. So if we wish to retain a divine, creative force we will have to alter a). The Manichaeon answer was to remove from a) 'solely' and perhaps 'omnipotent'; God did his best with the recalcitrant material to hand. But this position is not open to the Christian apologist who accepts that Creation is effected *ex nihilo* by a wholly



benevolent God.<sup>34</sup>

Just as it was found in the first part of this study that matter cannot stand outside of God's creation, so matter cannot be evil.

Matter... which is both made and made good by the Creator of all things... can be by no means evil.<sup>35</sup>

Matter is a creation of God's, and therefore cannot be in itself evil.<sup>36</sup> These are the two prongs of the anti-Manichaeism fork – matter is part of creation, and creation is effected by a wholly good and omnipotent creator. There remains, however, the problem of evil. Eriugena's answer to the problem of evil is characteristically Neoplatonic:

No evil... is found to exist substantially in nature, nor proceeds from a fixed and natural cause – for considered in itself it is absolutely nothing but the irrational and perverse and imperfect motion of the rational nature.<sup>37</sup>

The view that evil is the perverse motion of the rational nature will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, we can conclude that evil is not part of nature. In other words it is not caused by God; it is not part of creation.

For evil is inconstant and without cause, for as a substance it does not occur anywhere in nature.<sup>38</sup>

But there is no doubt that matter bears some relation to the evil that Eriugena hopes to account for by means of the doctrine of the Fall. After all matter and material bodies,

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<sup>34</sup> The doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* was not officially formulated until the Fourth Lateran Council 1215 but arguably it finds its first Christian formulation in Tatian (c.120 – c.179), *Oratio ad Graecos* 5, 3: "God was in the beginning; but the beginning, we have been taught, is the power of the Logos. For the Lord of the universe, who is Himself the necessary ground of all being, in as much as no creature was yet in existence, was alone." See May, Gerhard, *Creatio ex Nihilo, The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh, 1994). For Medieval Manichaeism see Runciman, Steven, *The Medieval Manichee. A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge, 1960 ).

<sup>35</sup> IV 828A; III 636C; Cf. III 699C: *qui de materia informi mundum fecit quemadmodum non aliunde accepit materiam de qua faceret sed a se et in se ipso.*

<sup>36</sup> This assumes that it is impossible for a wholly good God to will evil. See IV 826A; IV 827D-828A; V 926A.

<sup>37</sup> IV 826A: *malum nec in natura rerum substantialiter invenitur, neque ex certa causa et naturali procedit (per se enim consideratum, omnino nihil est, praeter irrationabilem et perversum imperfectumque rationabilis naturae motum).*

<sup>38</sup> IV 828A



“occupy the lowest extremity of the universal creature.”<sup>39</sup>

And Eriugena does sometimes adopt a position that seems to come close to the view that matter is in principle evil. Consider the following passage in which Eriugena is attempting to show why the stars are pale and cold:

So where the fiery force burns it is heat, where it does not burn it is cold; and it does not burn unless there is matter in which it may burn and which it may consume. And that is why the rays of the sun when they are diffused through the ethereal regions do not burn. When, however, they descend into the regions of the corporeal air, they find a kind of matter on which to work, and begin to blaze, and the more they go forth into denser bodies, the more they exercise their force of burning in those things which are or can be destroyed by the power of heat. But when they rise upwards into the uppermost regions of the world which are closest to the most rarefied and spiritual nature, not finding any matter for kindling, they produce no heat, and display only the operation of illumination, and therefore the ethereal and pure and spiritual bodies which are established in those regions are always shining, but are without heat. And hence they are believed to be both cold and pale.<sup>40</sup>

This passage seems to express a certain platonic distaste for matter; the closer one rises to, “the most rarefied and spiritual nature” the less matter one encounters. But it is worth noting that matter is in no way portrayed as an obstacle to God’s will.

Compare the above passage with a similar discussion in Augustine:

God, by whose laws the axes revolve, the celestial bodies complete their courses, the sun rules the day, the moon governs the night, and the whole world (insofar as perceptible matter allows) maintains the great stability of things by the ordering and repetition of times.<sup>41</sup>

Although the Eriugenian passage concerns created nature solely, and Augustine is attempting to explain God’s continuing role in creation, the characterisations of matter can, I suggest, legitimately be compared. For Augustine, supposedly free from his Manichaean past, matter is still conceived as a hindrance to God’s creative energy. Eriugena on the other hand thinks of matter as playing a role within God’s creation; it may be a role that explains corruption and change but nonetheless creation is

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<sup>39</sup> II 541D – 542A: *extremitatem universae creaturae deorsum*. See also V 875C; V 903AB. See also IV 759B: *extrema pars eius [i.e. hominis] et vilissima, corpus dico*.

<sup>40</sup> III 697BC

<sup>41</sup> *Soliloquies*, I, 1, 4.



inclusive of the material, rather than in spite of it. And the same position – that matter is not intrinsically evil – is maintained in his discussion of the incarnation. Eriugena follows Maximus the Confessor in ascribing to man four parts – body, sense, soul and intellect.<sup>42</sup> Christ, in adopting human nature therefore takes upon himself the parts of that nature and unifies them in himself.

For He was made perfect Man. For He left nothing of man, except sin, that He would not receive into the unity of His Substance and would not unify, that is, would not make one, in Himself. For in Him after His resurrection body and sense, soul and intellect are not four but one, and not a composite one, but simply one.<sup>43</sup>

Of interest here is the relation of body to the other three parts. The first thing to note is that it is given here (by Maximus and Eriugena) as a part of man, indeed an essential part of man. Further, there is no direct or necessary association made between sin and body. Sin finds no place in the incarnate Christ. But there is no hint here that the body is in itself sinful or distasteful.

It appears that although the material and the spiritual are to be accorded different *values*, they are both to be conceived as comprising one perfectly good creation.

There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. (1 Cor. 15: 40)

And Eriugena endorses the Pauline position, conceiving of the material or corporeal as a ‘perfection’ within God’s creation.

We maintain that when we were first created, body as well as soul subsisted without the capacity for corruption and death. For it would be contrary to reason to suppose that He Who created our whole nature together made one part of it (the soul) immortal and incorruptible, and the other part (the body) mortal and corruptible. Therefore, we have the right, I think, to suppose that the whole of human nature, soul and body, was at first created immortal and incorruptible.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> II 541B-542B. Eriugena is following Maximus, *I Ambigua* xxxvii (PG 91 1390B 13 – D 3.)

<sup>43</sup> II 541C

<sup>44</sup> V 884C



It appears that, although Eriugena's characterisation of matter is broadly negative – and that the virtuous have a healthy contempt for the frailty of earthly things<sup>45</sup> – it remains the case that, as created by God, matter is not intrinsically evil. In fact, since evil is characterised by Eriugena as a falling away from perfection, it follows that individuals are evil not on account of what they are, but on account of what they are not.<sup>46</sup>

In his distaste for the earthly, Eriugena expresses not only the Neoplatonic yearning for the transcendental, but also a characteristically ascetical disregard for the mundane. It remains for us to investigate the possibility that matter serves a teleological function; God created matter in order that man might be punished and thereby brought back into a correct alignment with his Creator.

#### IV : Matter as Punishment

Now that we have dismissed, for sound theological reasons, the possibility that matter is in itself evil, we must turn to a consideration of the view that material substance is a punishment for sin. Eriugena gives expression to this view throughout the

*Periphyseon*:

The earthly and mortal members of men should unhesitatingly be accepted and understood as the penalty of transgression which has been added (*adiuncta*) to the simplicity of the nature which was created by God.<sup>47</sup>

This addition of material substance for punishment should help explain why it is that Eriugena consistently characterises matter and body in negative terms as that which accounts for corruption and suffering and so on. If corporeality is a punishment, this

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<sup>45</sup> V 916C: *nam et superbia, quae veluti caput totius malitiae perhibetur, in amorem caelestis excellentiae, et in despectum terrenae infirmitatis in bonis hominibus vertitur.*

<sup>46</sup> V 934D: *non secundum quod sunt, sed secundum quod non sunt, mali dicuntur.*

<sup>47</sup> IV 852C; see also II 538B: *qualitatibus et quantitibus caeterisque varietatibus, quae propter peccatum generale generalis humanae naturae ad poenam eius... huic terrae habitabilii superaddita sunt.* IV 783A: *terrena haec habitatio mortalis corporis post peccatum impedit.* Also V 884B *et passim.*



would allow for its negative characterisation, and render its existence consistent with the view that creation is effected by a wholly benevolent and omnipotent creator.

Corporeality is a penalty, and it is a corrective:

For it is not to be believed that the most divine clemency of the Creator thrust forth sinning man into this world as though actuated by anger or desirous of revenge... but as a kind of ineffable teaching and incomprehensible clemency, so that man... might, having learnt from his punishments, seek the grace of his Creator.<sup>48</sup>

So here is the teleology behind the doctrine of the Fall. It serves a clear and manifest function – to bring man back to God.

There is one further aspect of the view that matter and body constitute a punishment for man's sin, that stands in need of examination, and that is the idea of 'addition.' Note that for Eriugena, man is not *changed* into a corruptible, mortal, animal. These characteristics are 'added' (*adiuncta*) to the simplicity of man's created nature. This simplicity remains, hidden behind these superficial additions.

The natural form of the body... remains ever incorruptible and immutable. For whatever is added to the natural body from the mixture of elements, and whatsoever is added to the soul from the impurity of irrational motions, is for ever in a state of flux and in process of decay.<sup>49</sup>

And yet for punishment to be effective, there must be a way for that which is being punished to recognise its punishment and the reasons for its punishment. Then there must also be the means to act upon this recognition and the means whereby it is able to take measures to correct the fault in the light of the recognition of the reasons for its being punished. After all if the punishment consists in permanently or essentially altering the punished, then punishment is reduced to revenge. And this, as a motive of God, Eriugena has explicitly ruled out. Eriugena offers, by way of illustration, the examples of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5) and the lepers (Luc. 17:11):

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<sup>48</sup> II 540B

<sup>49</sup> V 872D; for the incorruptibility of created human nature see IV 800C; V 908B; V 922AB.



For that Syrian, and those ten, had not lost the human countenance; they had only been smitten and covered up by the tumours and filthiness of leprosy; from which we are to understand that our nature is neither lost nor changed, but tarnished by the stains of vice.<sup>50</sup>

The illustration is borrowed from Gregory of Nyssa who aims to show that, “the body undergoes change by increase and diminution, like garments, which are changed with the changing of one’s age. But throughout all these changes there is a form which abides and is itself unchangeable.”<sup>51</sup>

Eriugena clearly intends the changeable, corrupt, leprous aspect to be identified with the mutable sensible form (QF) of a body, and that to which this sensible aspect has been added as the abiding substantial form (SF) or essence. This SF is the punished, the QF is the punishment. But this solution to the problem is not without a remainder: evil. Evil and punishment cannot be allowed to collapse into one another; punishment is administered *for* evil. Evil itself serves no purpose at all because it *is* nothing at all.<sup>52</sup> So it seems that matter and body cannot be evil on two counts. Firstly, they cannot be evil because they fall within the creation of a wholly benevolent and omnipotent God. And secondly, they cannot be evil because they are punishment *for* evil.

## V : Two Bodies, Two Creations

Two scriptural accounts:

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him.  
(Gen. 1:27)

And,

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)

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<sup>50</sup> V 873A

<sup>51</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* 27, 4 quoted by Eriugena at V 872AD

<sup>52</sup> *De Prae* 394C: *omne malum perversa voluntate descendens nihil sit.*



How to square these two apparently contradictory accounts of the creation of man?<sup>53</sup>

For Eriugena the two creations of man represent the extremes demarcated by the Fall.

The first creation of man is the pinnacle from which he has fallen. The second creation describes the state in which he now finds himself.

As a preliminary let us note that this is the Fall of *Man*. What, for Eriugena, constitutes a man? Eriugena is explicit in stating that a disembodied soul is not a man:

It is agreed that man is composed of two natures, the invisible nature in the soul and the visible nature in the body.<sup>54</sup>

A man consists essentially in a body and a soul. It cannot be the case, therefore, that the first creation of man according to the Image refers to the creation of the soul, and that the second creation passage describes God's fashioning the body, or visible aspect of man. It follows from Eriugena's statement quoted above that both creation passages must each account for an integral man – body and soul. But then it must be asked what kind of body that was which man possessed at the first creation.

“The body which was created at the establishment of man in the beginning”<sup>55</sup> is, according to Eriugena, immortal and spiritual. It is like (or identical with) the body that shall be ours after the resurrection.<sup>56</sup> This is the ‘invisible’ body we were able to identify at the end of the last chapter:<sup>57</sup> lacking all sensible form, it is strictly indefinable; it is possible to make of it only the claim that it is, not what it is. In fact it lacks all suchness and consists solely of a primitive substantial thisness.

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<sup>53</sup> See Otten, *The Anthropology of John Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden, 1991) p.135: “On the one hand Genesis wants to define man in terms of his rational dignity by calling him the image of God. On the other hand it undeniably presupposes some sort of irrational nature by describing him as an animal.” It is worth noting that at no point does the Genesis account describe man as the Image of God, but as having been made *in* the Image of God. Eriugena notes this at II 580A.

<sup>54</sup> IV 800A. ‘Visibility’ seems to be used here as a distinguishing feature. See the discussion of invisible bodies in Chapter Two, Part Two, Section IV, ii).

<sup>55</sup> IV 800B

<sup>56</sup> For the spiritual body see IV 760A-761B; IV 764A; IV 776A; IV 802Bff; IV852Cff; V 893D; V 929CD.

<sup>57</sup> See Chapter Two, Part Two, Section IV ii.



There is no one who doubts but that spiritual bodies are without [sc. place or time or quantity or quality.]<sup>58</sup>

The adherence to this individual substance of a quantum and qualia that render it visible, definable, corruptible and so on is a result of the Fall; or rather this process of adherence or addition *is* the Fall. Thus

I would not easily admit that it could have been a corruptible and material body at a time when the cause (*causa*) of corruption and materiality, that is, sin, had not yet appeared.<sup>59</sup>

That the Fall is a form of creation finds endorsement here. Eriugena claims that sin is the *cause* of the material world. But it was earlier accepted that sin can be given as the cause of the material world inasmuch as it is God's purpose, in causing man to have a material body, to punish his sinful nature.

It has been established that, for Eriugena, both passages in Genesis must refer to the integral man, that is, to man as body and soul. It has also been established that Eriugena explicitly denies that the first body is corruptible or material. It is a spiritual body. Closely following Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena goes on to deny that this spiritual body is changed (*conversum est*) or transformed (*transmutatum*)<sup>60</sup> into the corruptible body. The corruptible, material body of man is a superstructure (*supermachinatum*), added to the spiritual body.<sup>61</sup> Although Eriugena claims that this is quite apparent to reason (*maxime cum manifesta ratio*)<sup>62</sup> he offers no rational proof, merely adverting to the authority of Gregory. He then proceeds, however, to give Gregory's position: that which is created in the Image of God must be eternally

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<sup>58</sup> II 539A: *his enim omnibus [sc. loco vel tempore vel quantitate qualitateve spiritualia corpora carere] nemo qui dubitat.*

<sup>59</sup> IV 800B

<sup>60</sup> IV 800C

<sup>61</sup> See IV 802A: *illud exterius a deo est factum et superadditum*. We shall find in the next chapter that the opposite is the case when it comes to the Return: the corruptible body *is* transformed and changed into the spiritual body (see V 893D; V 930B). The reason for this difference is again essentially theodical. Whereas man (and not God) must be found to be responsible for corruption and sexuality etc., God (and not man) must be found to be responsible for our redemption.

<sup>62</sup> IV 800B



incorruptible. That is, both soul *and body* must be of an incorruptible nature since the whole man was made together in the Divine counsel (*in divino consilio*).<sup>63</sup> In an earlier passage Eriugena draws a series of sharp distinctions between the spiritual body, and the material body. In man, he says,

there mind is to be found, there reason, there sense, there the seminal life, there the body (*corpus*) – not this corruptible body which is the result of sin, but that which man had before the Fall: not this composite and dissoluble body, but that simple and indivisible body; not this animal and earthly body, but that which is spiritual and heavenly; not this body begotten by both sexes from seeds through carnal intercourse, but that which was brought forth before the Fall out of the simplicity of nature and which is to be in the Resurrection; not this body which is known to the corporeal senses, but that which is still (*adhuc*) hidden in the secret place of nature; not that which was laid upon us in recompense for sin, but that which was already inherent in us in our uncorrupted nature and to which the corruptible and mortal body will be restored.<sup>64</sup>

Again we find that no change takes place within the body; there is no transformation.

So man's pre-lapsarian nature (body and soul) remains *in secreto naturae adhuc occultum*, even after the Fall, intact, pristine, eternally incorruptible.

For everything which her Creator primordially created in her remains whole and intact, though remaining hidden until now, 'awaiting the revelation of the sons of God.' (Rom. 8:19)<sup>65</sup>

The only change that has taken place is the super-addition of a material body. And the exterior body relates to the interior in the same way that clothes relate to the exterior body. The exterior body is a *vestimentum*.<sup>66</sup>

[The exterior body] is moved through times and ages, suffering increase and loss of itself, while the interior body remains ever immutably in its proper state. But... the exterior body also is created by God, and is added by Him to the other.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> IV 800C: *nec animas ante corpora fuisse creatas, nec corpora ante animas, sed simul et semel totum factum in divino consilio.*

<sup>64</sup> IV 760AB

<sup>65</sup> IV 761B

<sup>66</sup> IV 802A

<sup>67</sup> IV 802A



It is no accident that the relation between exterior body and interior is precisely that of qualitative forms and substance or *ousia*. The QFs are a superficial and ever-changing presentation to the senses, while the SF remains hidden, simple and uniform, unavailable to the senses or the intellect.<sup>68</sup> The different terminology reflects the new theological, evaluative agenda announced at the beginning of Book IV.

But Eriugena is careful to point out that man does not have two bodies, or two natures, one material and one spiritual. There is in reality only one nature. The material or exterior body is a seal (*signaculum*) of the interior body, “in which the form of the soul is expressed.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, this impressed seal, this expression of the interior body is, “not so much regarded as a true body as a kind of mutable and corruptible garment of the true and natural body.”<sup>70</sup> Although the relation that obtains between interior and exterior bodies is not, therefore, precisely that of cause to effect, it is a relation of dependence. The interior body is a necessary condition of the exterior. And this corroborates the earlier identification of interior and exterior bodies with QF and substance. The QFs exist only in relation to substance; the non-substantial Categories depend on Substance.

#### i) Conclusion:

Before moving on to an analysis of Eriugena’s concept of Paradise, let us conclude this section by briefly returning to an earlier question and asking, was there any time at which man belonged in Paradise? Was there any time before the Fall? The following passage has already been quoted in order to explain the dual nature of man.

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<sup>68</sup> III 703A-C; I 494AB *et passim*.

<sup>69</sup> IV 802D-803A: *est enim exterius et materiale corpus signaculum interioris, in quo forma animae exprimitur*. ‘*Exprimitur*’ would perhaps be more helpfully translated as ‘impressed’ rather than ‘expressed.’

<sup>70</sup> IV 803A



I would not easily admit that it could have been a corruptible and material body at a time when the cause of corruption and materiality, that is, sin, had not yet appeared (*priusquam causa corruptionis et materialitatis fieret*).<sup>71</sup>

How are we to understand *priusquam*? It must refer to a time before the super-addition of this corruptible body.

If we are to retain our earlier conclusions, not only that the Fall and creation are simultaneous, but also that there was no time at which man was not falling, we must interpret this '*priusquam*' in an allegorical fashion. In the same way that a cause can be understood as 'before' an effect, and yet temporally simultaneous with it, so also man enjoyed Paradise 'before' his fall. The relation '*priusquam*' is to be interpreted logically, or metaphysically, rather than temporally. The Fall is not a temporal event. And as such it becomes the explanatory principle by recourse to which it is possible to understand of nature not why material substance is, nor what it is, but why it is the way it is. Could a temporal Fall not play the same role? Not precisely. By de-historicizing the Fall, Eriugena places the doctrine within the unending dialectic of procession and return. In a sense we must understand not only the result of the Fall as being present to us now, but also the Fall itself. This is not a post-lapsarian world, but a lapsarian world. This dialectical, atemporal understanding of the Fall, Eriugena articulates through the language of causation:

The mind receives the cause of its formation, without any intervening creature from God, while the vital motion receives it from the mind, and finally matter receives the cause of its formation from the mind through the vital motion. Thus matter follows vital motion, and vital motion follows mind, and finally mind follows God: when therefore it turns towards Him it preserves the beauty and integrity of its nature: but when it turns away from Him it wastes and disfigures not only itself but also that which is subject to it, that is, the material life principle and matter itself as well.<sup>72</sup>

In this passage Eriugena is explicitly making the claim that our moral or evaluative judgements precisely match the ontological structures of reality. And this

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<sup>71</sup> IV 800B

<sup>72</sup> IV 790D-791A



‘matching relation’ depends not on historical or temporal processes or events, but on our alignment – either with God, or with sensible effects. Indeed, the ‘matching relation’ has, we found a taxonomical, or quasi-creative function. In line with our findings in Part One of this chapter, there is nothing intrinsically evil in matter or corporeality; the evil resides in our attitude. The Fall is a state of mind.

## Part Two : Paradise

### Introduction:

Consistent with his view that man, as a result of sin, fell away from the perfection of his original created nature, Eriugena characterises Paradise not as a locality, but as that perfection of man’s original state.

Paradise is a mere figure of speech (*figuratae locutionis modo*) by which Holy Scripture signified the human nature that was made in the image of God.<sup>73</sup>

Thus Eriugena interprets the first two Genesis chapters as an allegorical psychology, a pictorial explanation of how human nature came to be as it is. Following Ambrose (whom he believes is himself following Origen),<sup>74</sup> Paradise or Eden is to be understood as referring to perfect human nature. Paradise is, therefore, truly substance. Adam and Eve represent Mind (νοῦς) and Sense (αἴσθησις)

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<sup>73</sup> IV 822A; Cf. V 981A

<sup>74</sup> At IV 815C Eriugena quotes Ambrose *De Paradiso* 2, 11 (CSEL 32, 1, p. 271, 8-16; PL 14 279B): *in figura mulieris sensum, in animi mentisque tupo virum constituens*. And at IV 815D he quotes Ambrose *De Paradiso* 3,12 (CSEL 32, 1 p. 272, 3-4; PL 279C): *est etiam νοῦς tanquam Adam, et est αἴσθησις (id est sensus) tanquam Eva*. Eriugena believes that Ambrose is indebted to Origen here. See Origen, *In Genesim Homiliae* I, 15; IV, 4; *In Exodum Homiliae* II, 1; XIII, 5, in Koetschau, (ed.) *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 29 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899) pp. 19, 54, 155, 277. For Eriugena’s use of Origen and endorsement of his ideas see Moran “Origen and Eriugena: Aspects of Christian Gnosis” in Finian, T. and Twomey, V. (eds.), *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity* (Four Courts Press : Dublin, 1992). Jeauneau (see n. 223 in IV p. 324 ) suggests that Ambrose is more likely to have been following Philo for the view that Mind (νοῦς) corresponds to Man, and that Sense (αἴσθησις) corresponds to Woman: Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 165, L. Cohn-Wendland (ed.) *Philonis Alexandrini Opera* (Berlin, 1896) p. 57, 14-15. Eriugena first makes the identification of male with mind, and woman with sense at II 541A.



respectively. Of interest here, however, is the presence of the body in Paradise. As has already been noted, for Eriugena human nature can be understood as comprising two bodies – one natural body, and one added to that natural body as punishment. And this additional body – an impression of the original – is corruptible and falls under the genus animal. It is therefore not surprising to find that the natural or substantial body of man is to be found within Paradise.

The fertile earth of this Paradise was the essential body (*corpus essenziale*), which possesses a possible immortality. For the natural body is said to die because it appears to share the death of that which is added (*superaddito*) to it: but in fact it is always immortal in itself.<sup>75</sup>

This body has an intellectual faculty represented allegorically by the ether; it has reason represented by the rays of the Divine wisdom. And it also has sense.

The water of this Paradise was the sense of the incorruptible body able to receive forms and formed by the phantasies of sensible things without being deceived.<sup>76</sup>

The view that man has two bodies – one created, one fallen – both equipped with sense, reason and intellect, thus finds scriptural endorsement.

### **I : A Tale of Two Trees: The Fall as Epistemic Crisis**

The Genesis text names two trees in the garden of Eden:

Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:9)<sup>77</sup>

And Eriugena is at pains to stress that Paradise is not a dense forest thick with many varieties of trees. Certainly not. Genesis names two trees: the All-tree, or Πάν, and

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<sup>75</sup> IV 822B

<sup>76</sup> IV 822B

<sup>77</sup> Gen.2:9: *Produxitque Dominus Deus de humo omne lignum pulchrum visu et ad vescendum suave etiam lignum vitae in medio paradisi lignumque scientiae boni et mali.* (Vulgate)



the Tree of Knowledge, or Γνωστόν. And that's it: *duo solummodo*.<sup>78</sup>

Following Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena understands the 'All-Tree' to be an allegorical reference to Christ the Word, the Cause of creation, in whom all things are made and subsist.<sup>79</sup> The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is the direct opposite of the tree of life.<sup>80</sup> Whereas the former is all good, the other has only the appearance of good and is in fact the totality of all evil (*in isto universitas totius mali*).<sup>81</sup>

Just as the Tree of Knowledge plays a pivotal role in the Genesis story, the tree, as it is understood in the *Periphyseon*, provides the key to Eriugena's understanding of the Fall. Central to this understanding is the appearance of sensible matter, or body.

#### i) The *Gnoston*:

Eriugena asserts at the opening of his discussion of the Tree of Knowledge that a translation of 'knowable' for γνωστόν, "does not satisfactorily express the meaning (*intellectum*) of the tree."<sup>82</sup> Instead he prefers the term 'mixed' (*mixtum*). No reason for this translation is given beyond its being preferable in the light of what follows. For, Eriugena explains, the tree is

evil disguised under the colour of good which is instilled into the bodily senses (*corporis sensibus*).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> IV 823B

<sup>79</sup> IV 823B. Eriugena finds a double identification of the All-tree with Christ. Firstly, the tree represents Christ as that principle in which man participates. And secondly, since the tree is planted in the midst of human nature, Eriugena detects a reference to the incarnation. The Tree therefore functions as a reminder of Christ's dual nature – divine and human.

<sup>80</sup> IV 824B: *omnino contrarium*.

<sup>81</sup> IV 824B

<sup>82</sup> IV 823A

<sup>83</sup> IV 824B



It has the appearance of good. But under the veil of good, it is pure evil. It is, therefore, a mixture. The goodness of the tree is only a lure: “It seduces all evil men by its appearance of good.”<sup>84</sup>

Eriugena offers a significantly more complex account of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in a later passage. Eriugena quotes Augustine, explaining that the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was not in itself bad. Eve was tempted to eat of the tree *too soon*; the fruit was being reserved for a more suitable occasion.

It was by their overhastiness (*festinatione*) that those first human beings anticipated their desire for knowledge of good and evil, and... they wished, before the time was ripe, for that which was being reserved for them at a more opportune occasion.<sup>85</sup>

The fruit could have been profitably eaten, Augustine claims, without the dire consequences, at a later occasion. And Eriugena endorses this view: “Those who hold such opinions concerning the Forbidden Tree do not seem to me to depart from the truth.”<sup>86</sup> The view expressed by Augustine and adopted by Eriugena in this later passage is inconsistent with the previous position proposed, that the tree is the totality of evil, disguised as good. It is hard to see how the fruit of this ‘evil’ tree could “be profitably enjoyed” (*salubriter perfrui*).<sup>87</sup>

This more sophisticated, Augustinian exegesis provides Eriugena with the keystone in his own construction of Man’s Fall.

It is likely and quite in accordance, I think, with sound reason that man should have been driven by the most righteous judgement of his Creator away from the sweetness of the Tree of Life, that is to say, from the delights of the internal contemplation, in which and for which he was created, at the very moment that he began to feed on the Forbidden Tree, that is, to presume to

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<sup>84</sup> IV 824BC

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* XI xli, 56 (CSEL 28, 1, pp. 375, 24 – 376,8); quoted at IV 843D – 844A.

<sup>86</sup> IV 844B

<sup>87</sup> IV 844A



make improper use of the sense knowledge of sensible matter (*cognitione videlicet sensibilis materiae per corporeos sensus abuti praesumentem*).<sup>88</sup>

This ‘presumption’ to abuse the sensory faculty is the locus of the Fall for Eriugena.

Notice again that man’s sin lies in a *pre*-sumption, that is in a too-soon-picking of the fruit. Note also that the transgression is in essence epistemological – the improper use of sense knowledge. And the punishment fits the crime, since the penalty for the transgression is also primarily epistemological: man is driven from the delights of internal contemplation (*ab internae contemplationis... deliciis*).<sup>89</sup> The penalty is only *primarily* but not solely epistemological for the penalty has a metaphysical corollary: man was made in and for this internal contemplation that is represented by the Tree of Life, that Image in which and for which man was made. It follows that man is driven out of his true nature. The Fall is not so much an act of creation, as an act of uncreation. Thus, according to the Fifth Mode of Being and Non-being,

through sin it [sc. human nature] renounced the honour of the divine image in which it was properly substantiated, deservedly lost its being (*merito esse suum perdidit*) and therefore is said not to be.<sup>90</sup>

To return to the *Gnoston*, it now seems that the Forbidden Tree is not in and of itself evil, but rather it is dangerous. Nor is the appearance of sensible matter evil, nor does sensible matter incline the perceiver towards evil. Rather, Eriugena claims that man should

contemplate the creature with the reasonable sense controlled by the dictates of the mind, and to refer all its beauty to the glory of the Creator, whether the inner beauty of the principles or the outward beauty of the sensible forms.<sup>91</sup>

The problem is not, therefore, with a principle of evil that exists in creation, even within the creation of human nature; evil is nothing more than a disordering of human

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<sup>88</sup> IV 844B

<sup>89</sup> IV 844B

<sup>90</sup> I 445C

<sup>91</sup> IV 843C. Note that here again sense perception and its objects are not themselves evil. Rather it is the debased or sinful manner in which the faculties are deployed that accounts for the Fall.



nature, an improper use of the sensory and intellectual faculties. The mistake made by the first human is, in short, to place the material, external effect above the immaterial, internal cause.

For it is impossible that knowledge of the creature could be an impediment to the rational soul, in which the perfect contemplation of the Creator begins to shine forth. But where the observation of created nature precedes (*praecedit*) the knowledge of the Creator, there is no way of escaping the phantasies and beguilements of sensible things.<sup>92</sup>

The Fall represents a disordering of the human intellect, a sort of epistemological crisis.<sup>93</sup> In a later passage, Eriugena discusses the Genesis passage, “I will multiply your sorrows and your conceptions: in labour shall you bring forth your sons.” (Gen. 3:16). For Eriugena, as has already been noted, Eve (whom God is addressing here) represents αἰσθησις, or the sensory faculty.<sup>94</sup> And on this basis the above Genesis passage is glossed as follows:

If man had not sinned he would have contemplated the natures and the principles of all things in a most pure manner with the utmost ease not only with the interior intellect but also with the exterior sense, for he would have been freed from the necessity of all logical discourse. But after he had sinned, the mind perceives through the corporeal sense only the surfaces of sensible things, with their quantities and qualities, their positions, their conditions, and the other aspects which submit to corporeal perception.<sup>95</sup>

This is a fascinating passage and warrants further study. Here Eriugena explicitly links the work on the Categories in Book I with the theological, exegetical agenda of Book IV. For Eriugena all human knowledge is predicated on sense data,

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<sup>92</sup> IV 844C

<sup>93</sup> The idea that the mind’s association with the body results in the impairment of the mind’s natural / essential faculties has an ancient provenance. Cf. Ammonius, *On Aristotle’s Categories*, 15, 4-8: “If souls were on high, separate from the body, each of them would on its own know all things, without need of anything else. But they descend at birth and are bound up with the body, and, filled up with its fog, their sight becomes dim and they are not able to know things it is in their nature to know.” Trans. S. Marc Cohen and Gareth B. Matthews (Duckworth, 1991) p. 22.

<sup>94</sup> IV 813B: *corporeum sensum, per quem Adam deceptus est, in figura mulieris vult intelligi. Nam apud graecos αἰσθησις (id est sensus) feminini generis est.*

<sup>95</sup> IV 855A



and is therefore fallible.<sup>96</sup> In accordance with the conclusions of Book I's long commentary on the *Categories*, Eriugena claims that the categories themselves – Quantity, Quality, Position and Condition etc. – are not available to the intellect, only their phantasies. The human epistemological apparatus is therefore at a double remove from the true nature and principle of all things. It must rely on phantasies of surface “aspects which submit to corporeal perception.” And these aspects, as has already been discussed, are not to be identified with the substance.

The waters in Paradise, Eriugena interprets as referring to the sense of the incorruptible spiritual body, “able to receive forms and formed by the phantasies of sensible things without being deceived.”<sup>97</sup> Of course this mode of sensation is barred to man on account of his having drunk from the, “poison of transgression (*veneno praevaricationis*).”<sup>98</sup>

But there is more to be gleaned from the above passage. In the second sentence it was claimed that, “the human mind perceives through the corporeal sense only the surfaces of things.” A number of points need to be raised here. The Latin is as follows:

*Per organa exterioris sensus nonnisi solas sensibilia superficies...animus percipit.*

At first glance it appears that Eriugena wants to make the claim that prior to the Fall man could have contemplated the nature of things with both the intellect and the senses. After the Fall, however, *only* the exterior sense is available. But this cannot be right. Elsewhere Eriugena explicitly states that the human cognitive faculty consists in

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<sup>96</sup> V 1021BC: *Nil enim perfectum est in humanis studiis adhuc, ut opinor, in hac caliginosa vita, quod omni errore careat... Non enim crediderim, ullum mortalibus membris carnalibusque sensibus gravatum, excepto Christo, ad perfectum virtutis habitum veraeque contemplationis altitudinem pervenisse.*

<sup>97</sup> IV 822B

<sup>98</sup> IV 822B. Cf. Augustine, *de Genesi ad litteram*. VI, xxv-xxvi, 36-37 (CSEL 28, 1 pp. 197-8).



the intellect allied to a sensory faculty.<sup>99</sup> A closer reading of the text shows that there is no lack of intellect in the fallen human psychology. In the Latin there is no confusion; the ‘only’ qualifies the ‘surfaces’, not the ‘exterior sense’. So it is not the case that there is *only* the exterior sense available to the human mind. Rather it is the exterior sense itself that falls short by perceiving *only* the surfaces of things.

Is it possible to conclude, therefore, that in both his pre- and post-lapsarian states man’s epistemic apparatus consists in intellect and sense? Not quite. Let us turn to another passage:

The First Man... was able to contemplate all the animals and birds... by contemplation not of a localised kind nor by the corporeal sense (*sensu corporeo*), but by the observation of the mind alone (*solo mentis*) (which excels every corruptible sense, and all place and all time) of the principles according to which they were created.<sup>100</sup>

In this passage Eriugena reflects upon the power of the human epistemic faculty before the crisis. And it seems that the corporeal sense is either not present as part of the human cognitive apparatus, or, if it is present, it is not necessary.

The two passages are seemingly inconsistent with one another in regard to the exterior sense prior to the Fall. In the first passage Eriugena claims that prior to sinning, man was able to use this exterior sense but in an elevated manner that did not perceive only the surfaces of things. In the second passage, however, the exterior sense is non-existent. Presumably, according to the second view, the exterior sense is added after – or indeed because of – the Fall. In another passage Eriugena adopts the same somewhat ambivalent position:

And the First Man had so spiritual a nature that he did not require the use of any corporeal sense (*corporaliū sensuum*), but could depend wholly on the function of his intelligence.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> III 711C

<sup>100</sup> IV 835A

<sup>101</sup> IV 834C



Again no explicit statement as to the *existence* of a pre-lapsarian sensory faculty is given. Here it is merely not needed. In the next section we shall examine more closely the faculties of the human being, body and soul. Before moving on, however, let us briefly recapitulate.

The aim of the present enquiry has been to try to discern whether or not material substance or the sensible body represents the wages of sin. We found that since creation is wholly the work of a wholly benevolent creator, the object of sense perception is not evil in itself. Through the examination of the *Gnoston*, it was found that the sensory faculty is not evil. It cannot be so since – although Eriugena is not completely clear on this point – the pristine, created interior body may also be in receipt of a sense faculty. Therefore, neither the perceived nor the means of perception are in themselves evil. The locus of evil must, therefore, be the perceiver.

## II : The Six Parts of Man

Eriugena follows Gregory of Nyssa in dividing human nature into six parts.<sup>102</sup> Firstly, there is the primary division between body and soul. Eriugena then asserts that each of these two parts can be further subdivided into three. Thus the body or exterior man (*exteriori videlicet homini*),<sup>103</sup> consists in the body itself which is, “constituted out of formed matter, of which only being may be predicated, than which the human understanding finds nothing lower in human nature.”<sup>104</sup> It has already been discussed how matter or bare corporeality, though not evil in itself, is base or low. Above this corporeality but still part of the exterior man is the, “nutritive and auctive part” (*nutritiva et auctiva*) or “vital motion” (*vitalis motus*),<sup>105</sup> responsible, as we might

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<sup>102</sup> IV 824C – IV 825C

<sup>103</sup> IV 824D

<sup>104</sup> IV 824D

<sup>105</sup> IV 824D and IV 825A



expect, for nourishment and growth and movement, but also for holding the body together so that it does not fall apart and dissolve.<sup>106</sup> It is also defined as that which gives life to the body. The third and final part of the exterior man is the sensory faculty, that which “receives the phantasies of all sensible objects which surround man externally and conveys them to the memory.”<sup>107</sup>

So much for the exterior man. The interior man, Eriugena tells us, subsists in the soul alone. And it is this part of man that is made in the image of God. It consists in that faculty whereby the phantasies of sense objects, transmitted to it from the ‘receptive’ faculty – the highest faculty of the exterior man – are distinguished and judged. Next comes the reason by means of which man is able to, “investigate the ‘reasons’ of all things which are apprehended by the intelligence or the sense.”<sup>108</sup> And finally there is the mind, the highest part of human nature,

whose function is the government of the parts which are inferior to it, and the contemplation of what lies above it, namely God, and of what lies in Him and subsists about Him, according as it is allowed to ascend.<sup>109</sup>

Having listed each of the six parts of man, Eriugena recapitulates, underlining the difference according to function and property between the body and soul. Thus

human nature is, and lives, and perceives through the body; it perceives and reasons, and intellects outside of the body.<sup>110</sup>

As might be expected, the first triad is corruptible and susceptible of dissolution, whereas the second triad is incorruptible, indissoluble and eternal.

This clearly raises questions. Is it to be assumed that that which survives corporeal dissolution (viz the soul) does not ‘live’, and indeed is not? For note that

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<sup>106</sup> IV 824D-825A: *continet in uno, ne defluat et solvatur.*

<sup>107</sup> IV 825A: *phantasias omnium rerum sensibilibus quae circa hominem exteriorem intelliguntur recipit, memoriaeque.* (NB O’Meara’s translation of *exteriorem* adverbially. Eriugena means to say that sense objects surround the exterior man, not that the whole man (interior and exterior) is surrounded by sense objects. The difference is, I take it, philosophically trivial.)

<sup>108</sup> IV 825B: *rationem possidet, per quam omnium rerum, quas vel intelligere vel sentire potest, rationes investigat.*

<sup>109</sup> IV 825B

<sup>110</sup> IV825B: *Est enim, et vivit, et sentit per corpus; sentit extra corpus, ratiocinatur, intellegit.*



‘being’ is, according to the above quote, properly predicated only of the exterior or corporeal man. Or rather it is predicated of human nature only in its integral form, that is body and soul, exterior and interior. Eriugena conceives of ‘life’ as the second part of the exterior man. He calls it vital motion (*vitalis motus*); it is the animating principle; it gives life to the bare formed matter or body. Man shares this faculty with both sentient and non-sentient life, for although it does control movement locally through space (*localiter spatia locorum*)<sup>111</sup> which is a faculty peculiar to animals, it is also responsible for motion through numbers of place and time (*per numeros locorum et temporum*).<sup>112</sup> By numbers of place Eriugena means to refer to the proportions, or fullness, of the body’s parts. And the numbers of time measure the temporal increments by means of which the body is brought to its perfection. This form of motion is clearly not simply peculiar to animals but includes plants as well.

‘Being’ too, Eriugena seems to imply, cannot be predicated of the interior man once it is separated from the exterior. Eriugena claims that the first and lowest part of the exterior man is the body constituted out of formed matter; of this body, “only being may be predicated” (*de quo solummodo praedicatur esse*).<sup>113</sup> And here we encounter an ambiguity. Does Eriugena mean us to understand that,

- a) ‘being’ is the only available predicate of body, or,
- b) only of body can ‘being’ be predicated?

Proposition a) makes the claim that no predicates can be applied to body except ‘being.’

In Book I, Eriugena has argued that body is a concourse of accidents. Body cannot subsist by itself without its accidents.

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<sup>111</sup> IV 825A

<sup>112</sup> IV 825A

<sup>113</sup> IV 824D



For if you withdraw quantity from body it will not be a body; for it is held together by the dimensions and number of its members. Similarly if you take quality away from it, what is left will be shapeless and nothing (*deforme et nihil.*)<sup>114</sup>

It follows that there cannot be a body of which it is possible to predicate only ‘being’.

For there to be a body at all, it must be understood to have quantity, quality, and so on. So a) is false.

But *prima facie* b) looks no better. It appears to run counter to a great deal of Eriugena’s thinking, and perhaps specifically to his thinking here concerning the soul’s eternal existence compared to the body’s temporal and corruptible nature.

Recall, however, that, according to Eriugena,

all things which fall within the perception of bodily sense or within the grasp of the intelligence are truly and reasonably said to be, but that those which because of the excellence of their nature elude not only all sense but also all intellect and reason rightly seem not to be.<sup>115</sup>

Eriugena quotes at length from Gregory of Nyssa to illustrate his own view that, since man is made in the Image of God, he, like the Image in whose likeness he was made, is incomprehensible. And therefore, according to the programmatic statement quoted above, is not.

Since the very nature of our mind, which is made in the image of its Creator, escapes knowledge, it possesses a scrupulous likeness to that which is placed above it by the fact that in itself it is unknowable, showing the characteristic of an incomprehensible nature.<sup>116</sup>

Corporeality and its epistemological concomitant – perceptibility, are attributed to the image (man) as a result of his fault.

So b) can stand as long as we accept that ‘being’ cannot be predicated of any substance because substance falls beyond the grasp of the sensory and intellectual

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<sup>114</sup> I 503B

<sup>115</sup> I 443A: *omnia quae corporeo sensui vel intelligentiae perceptioni succumbunt vere ac rationabiliter dici esse, ea vero quae per excellentiam suae naturae non solum omnem sensum sed etiam omnem intellectum rationemque fugiunt iure videri non esse.*

<sup>116</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* 11, 4 (PG 44, 153C – 156B), quoted at IV 789A.



faculties. It is only the *material* or exterior body that is added as a result of the Fall.

But prior to the Fall, and after the Resurrection man still has a body. Only then it is a spiritual, or essential body.

I think that the quality of the spiritual body is such as to be a fitting abode not only for all hallowed and perfected souls, but also for the whole creature that is to be liberated from the servitude of corruption. It is of this body that the Apostle says, 'We have a dwelling not made with hands, being eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. 5:1), i.e. in the mansions of the blessed.' This gives us an indication of the purity and subtlety and glory of that body compared with those which are now, even the most splendid and heavenly, visible and made with hands. But of the other we are told that it is not made with hands, but is eternal in the heavens. Since, then, those which are visible are temporal whereas those which are invisible are eternal, all these bodies which we behold or can behold on earth and in heaven and which are made with hands and are not eternal are far excelled by that which is neither visible nor made with hands but eternal.<sup>117</sup>

### III : Conclusion

It was the aim of this chapter to try to discern whether Eriugena conceives matter and body as evil, or as punishment for evil. The Manichaean solution that matter itself is evil was quickly abandoned; and it was found that Eriuegna himself, although his attitude to matter and body is largely negative, does make it clear that matter is made by God, and well-made. Pondering the second position – that matter and body are punishment for sin – led to a further question: does the Fall explain why we have corporeal bodies, or is it actually the cause of our corporeal bodies? It was found that within the dialectic of procession and return the Christian exegete is faced with two candidates for the outward movement. It is possible to map the Neoplatonic emanation onto the Creation, or onto the Fall. The Christian Neoplatonist is spoiled for choice. But Eriugena is careful not to conflate the two, and the assertion that the Fall, if not *the* creation, is a second quasi-creation was adopted: the Fall *explains* the multiplicity of creation. In order to consolidate this position we attempted to

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<sup>117</sup> V 929C – 930A



demonstrate that, for Eriugena, the Fall takes place within the human epistemic capacity. The Fall accounts for the way the material, transient world appears to us (that is, as material, transient, susceptible of change, and so on) but it is not itself the direct cause of this world.<sup>118</sup> There is ultimately only one cause, and that is God. God is the efficient, material, formal and final cause of the world.

God created the visible creature to this purpose, that through it, as likewise through the invisible, His glory might abound and that He might be known – not as to what He is, but that He is – to be the One Creator of the whole creature, visible and invisible.<sup>119</sup>

It is important to note from the quote above that the creation would comprise invisible *and visible* even if the Fall had never taken place. Matter, including visible matter, is not evil. The evil is in man's turning away from God; according to the Genesis account, the sin consists in Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit. The events in the garden are explained by Eriugena as follows:

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is pernicious and deadly wickedness masquerading under the form of good, and this tree is planted, as it were, in a woman, that is, in the carnal sense, which it deceives. And if the mind consents to the sense, then the integrity of the whole human nature is destroyed.<sup>120</sup>

At this point in the argument it was necessary to examine more carefully Eriugena's anthropology: the six parts of man, the corporeal and spiritual bodies. It was found that the difference the Fall hopes to explain between 'what would have been' and 'what is' lies not in substantial nature, but in qualitative appearance. And this qualitative appearance originates not in substance but in the, "likenesses of sensible

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<sup>118</sup> "His [sc. man's] thought is the spatio-temporal becoming of nature as the Divine Wisdom is its eternal essence." I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena" in Armstrong, A.H. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967) p. 528.

<sup>119</sup> IV 843B

<sup>120</sup> IV 826D-827A: *lignum scientiae boni et mali malitia perniciose mortiferaque in figura boni imaginata; et hoc lignum veluti intra quandam feminam (in carnali scilicet sensu, quem decipit) constitutum. Cui sensui si animus consenserit, totius naturae humanae integritas corrumpitur.*



things coming from the qualities and quantities of the outside world.”<sup>121</sup> It is in the exterior sense, or rather in the abuse of it, that the Fall takes place. In turning away from the contemplation of God (for which he was created) man found himself bewitched by the surfaces of things, the qualitative, the quantitative.

When therefore it [the human mind] turns towards Him it preserves the beauty and integrity of its nature: but when it turns away from Him it wastes and disfigures not only itself but also that which is subject to it, that is the material life principle and matter itself as well.<sup>122</sup>

It is worth noting in this passage the use of the present tense. The doctrine of the Fall is presented by Eriugena ‘ahistorically.’ The Fall is a continuous and unending process. The metaphysical / theological grounds upon which this unprecedented rendering of the Fall rests is God’s atemporality. This atemporality results in Eriugena’s conception of the Fall being simultaneous with creation. And this simultaneity raised a number of superficial (mainly exegetical) difficulties.

In conclusion, however, let us return to an examination of the non-metaphysical ramifications of de-historicizing the doctrine of the Fall. This examination will prove crucial to an understanding of Eriugena’s attitude to body and material substance.

#### i) The Fall as Guide for Living:

The Fall, when dishistoricized, becomes a guide to living. How is this claim to be squared with our initial assertion that the Fall is a theodicy? It has already been noted that the punishment, in order to act as a corrective, must contain the possibility of its avoidance. The lesson is learnable.

The Fall for Eriugena, therefore, has a protreptic function; it is designed to lead man back into a correct alignment with his created nature, and therefore with the

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<sup>121</sup> II 569D: *similitudines ex qualitatibus et quantitibus exterioris mundi venientes.*

<sup>122</sup> IV 791A



Creator. An acceptance of the Fall is a necessary first step on the Return. In this respect, Eriugena is close to Maximus:

The passion of love, when reprehensible, occupies the intellect with material things, but when rightly directed unites it with the divine. For the intellect tends to develop its powers among those things to which it devotes its attention; and where it develops its powers, there it will direct its desire and love. It will direct them, that is to say, either to what is divine, intelligible and proper to its nature, or to the passions and things of the flesh.<sup>123</sup>

Of course, Maximus is not using the language of the Fall here, but the epistemological and psychological position is identical. As has already been shown, Eriugena does not believe that, as a result of the Fall, the human intellect is removed or unavailable, rather it is impaired. Maximus identifies the impairment with the misdirection of the intellect, an occupation with the passions and things of the flesh. And this is precisely Eriugena's position. The fault (or the Fall) lies not in the things of the flesh themselves, nor in the human intellect, nor, for Maximus, in the passion of love; it lies in the manner in which the intellect is deployed.

There is no evil which is found to exist substantially in nature, nor proceeds from a fixed and natural cause – for considered in itself it is absolutely nothing but the irrational and perverse and imperfect motion of the rational nature – it can find no other abode in the universal creature save where falsehood resides: and the proper residence of falsehood is in the corporeal sense.<sup>124</sup>

ii) There is no Fall – a Reprise:

This discussion of the doctrine of the Fall in the *Periphyseon* opened with an examination of the possibility that there is in fact no doctrine of the Fall to be found in the *Periphyseon*. In conclusion I would like to return to this question. This sounds perverse since this chapter has been devoted to showing how for Eriugena the Fall is – after all the problems and difficulties – a necessary stage in Eriugena's overall

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<sup>123</sup> St. Maximos the Confessor, *Third Century on Love*, 71 in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol. 2 trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherard, Kallistos Ware (Faber, 1981) p. 94

<sup>124</sup> IV 826AB



explication of the nature of the relationship between God and Creation. This time, however, I would like to approach the claim that there is no Fall from an entirely different direction.

First time around we pondered a pair of possibilities, firstly that there could be no Fall if there was no time during which man was in Paradise, and secondly, that the Fall is redundant if it serves precisely the same function as Creation. Now I would like to consider a further possibility. How can we speak of a Fall, if man never left Paradise in the first place?

For on His [sc. Christ's] return from the dead into paradise He conversed in this world with His disciples, clearly showing them that paradise is not other than the glory of the resurrection which first appeared in Him and which He would bestow upon all the faithful; and teaching them that our habitable globe has not any difference in paradise in respect of the reason of its nature; for it is not by nature that they are separated but by the qualities and quantities and other variations, things that were added subsequently to this habitable earth as the consequence of the general sin of human nature in general for its punishment, and, what is more, also for its correction and education.<sup>125</sup>

It would appear from this passage that there is no *natural* difference between Paradise and the created universe. By 'natural' here Eriugena means something like 'substantial'. Thus it seems that Paradise just is this habitable globe understood as subsisting in its substantial causes. And yet there is no suggestion that, if this is the case, there is no Fall. Rather, the Fall becomes immediately and glaringly necessary as a means of explaining why, if there is no substantial difference between this world and Paradise, this world is subject to corporeality, corruptibility and so on. The difference between this world and Paradise is, Eriugena explains, non-substance – the qualitative or sensible forms. So, when in Chapter One, it was noted that QFs are

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<sup>125</sup> II 538AB: *nam ex mortuis in paradisum rediens in hoc orbe cum discipulis suis conservatus est, ostendens eis manifeste non aliud esse paradisum praeter resurrectionis gloriam quae primum in eo apparuit et quam omnibus fidelibus daturus est docensque nostrum orbem terrarum differentiam in paradiso iuxta rationem naturae non habere non enim natura separantur sed qualitatibus et quantitibus caeterisque varietatibus, quae propter peccatum generale generalis humanae naturae ad poenam eius, immo etiam ad correctionem et exercitationem, hiuc terrae habitabili superaddita sunt.*



“joined to (*adhaerens*) matter so as to constitute body,”<sup>126</sup> we were actually discussing the Fall. We also noted that a QF is, according to Eriugena’s definition, “a species of quality that, when it is joined to (*superadditam*) matter, produces body, of which the substance is οὐσία.”<sup>127</sup> Again, the Fall.

Now, if QFs, deriving from the categories of Quality (*Qualitas*), Situation (*Situs*), and Condition (*Habitus*), are, when joined to quanta, prerequisites for perception,<sup>128</sup> and if these QFs are added to substantial or natural body as punishment for sin (the Fall), and if “bodies, if not perceived by the senses, are not bodies”<sup>129</sup> then it follows that an exhaustive account of body, for Eriugena, must necessarily make reference to the Fall. In other words, a body is a body *qua* perceivable in virtue of the fact that it has had added to it certain superficial (i.e. non-substantial, or non-natural) features. It is in this sense, and for this reason, that it is possible to speak of the Fall as that which, “effected the creation of the body and material world.”<sup>130</sup> It has been the aim of this chapter to balance this claim with the view that the Fall also represents an ‘uncreation’, a falling away from the perfection of created nature. The Fall is, on this reading, a ‘misperception’, the wilful corruption of the intellect by the exterior sense. Were it the case that Eve (*aisthesis*) and then Adam (*nous*) had not succumbed to the blandishments of the serpent then, “the sensible nature would not in him [sc. Man] be

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<sup>126</sup> III 703B

<sup>127</sup> I 495B; note the terminology. In the bare metaphysical account *and* in the theological / scriptural account the verb ‘*superaddere*’ is used. This surely suggests that the same verb is being used to explain *the same process*.

<sup>128</sup> I 479A

<sup>129</sup> I 479A: *corpora vero si sensibus non percipiuntur corpora non sunt*.

<sup>130</sup> Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (Oxford, 2000) p. 79. Cf. Sheldon-Williams’s claim that man is “a kind of subsidiary creator.” Sheldon-Williams, “The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena,” *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967. p. 528. Moran calls the mind, “a quasi creator of the universe... It is due to the movements of the mind that the ontological orders come to be formed.” Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 126. The ambivalent “due to” is worth noting; the relation is neither causal nor coincidental.



distinct from the intelligible.”<sup>131</sup> According to Eriugena the difference between the world as it is and the Paradise that God created is a function of man’s moral failing.

For it is not by matter or spatial intervals that paradise is distinguished from this inhabited globe but diversity of conduct and difference in degree of blessedness.<sup>132</sup>

The difference, and the Fall that explains the difference, exist only in the cognitive faculty of man.

The unification of natural substances is in the intellect alone, but not in the things themselves, that is to say, that it is not those things which through generation into divers genera and divers forms and infinite individuals received from the Creator’s Providence their intelligible and sensible diversity... but their primordial causes and reasons, that are gathered into a certain unification, and that by an act of intelligence, not in the thing itself.<sup>133</sup>

Finally let us turn to an examination of a Fall narrative that should make clear the difference between the ‘reality’ of created nature, and the ‘phantasy’ of fallen nature.

Not that even now God is not all in all, but after the sin of human nature and its expulsion from the abode of paradise, when, that is, it was thrust down from the height of the spiritual life and knowledge of the most clear wisdom into the deepest darkness of ignorance, no one unless illuminated by Divine Grace and rapt with Paul into the height of the Divine Mysteries can see with the sight of true understanding how God is all in all, for there intervenes the cloud of fleshly thoughts (*nube carnalium cogitationum*) and the darkness of variegated phantasies (*variarumque phantasiarum caligine*), and the keenness of the mind is weakened by the irrational passions, and is turned back from the splendours of clear truth and is held in the grasp of bodily shadows (*corporalibus umbris contenta*) to which it has become accustomed.<sup>134</sup>

Of particular interest here is the claim that the truth is unavailable to the mind and that the mind is somehow ‘held’ by “bodily shadows.” By “bodily shadows” Eriugena means to refer to the sensible body, that agglomeration of QFs investing a single and

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<sup>131</sup> II 536C: *sensibilis natura ab intelligibili in eo non discreparetur.*

<sup>132</sup> II 538B: *non enim mole vel spatiis discernitur paradysus ab isto habitabili orbe terrarum sed diversitate conversacionis differentiaque beatitudinis.* Cf. V 871D: *non enim gressibus corporis, sed affectibus mentis elongatur a Deo.*

<sup>133</sup> II 535CD

<sup>134</sup> III 683CD



simple substantial form. But it is also to be noted that the fallen nature of the sensible world is not *how things really are*. The body is merely a shadow, an illusion.

In the next chapter we shall be concerned with how we are to go about crossing this conceptual gap between shadow and reality, between ignorance and true understanding, between earth and Paradise.



## Chapter Four : The Return

The end of this sensible world will be nothing else but its return into God.<sup>1</sup>

### Part One : Death and Resurrection

#### Introduction:

Whereas in the last chapter it was necessary to unravel the whole of the Fall in order to examine effectively the fallen nature of material substance and body, here the requirement is less exhaustive. There is no need to follow the whole arc of the Return of human nature into God as only some of this process concerns body and material substance. Instead the focus shall be on the death of the exterior body, its dissolution and its resurrection. The second half of the chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the Return as a process of unification.

Eriugena admits that much of his thinking concerning the resurrection and the Return of all things to God contains “unprecedented ideas” (*incognita nondum patefacta sunt*).<sup>2</sup> Since these ideas find little or no support in Scripture or in the Patristic authorities we can expect them to depend to a large extent on the metaphysical groundwork of the first three books of the *Periphyseon*, that is, in the relation of cause to effect, genus to species, categorial difference, the means of individuation, the roles of form and matter in constituting body.

Book V of the *Periphyseon* is, as a consequence, markedly less exegetical than the last third of Book III and the whole of Book IV. Still, although for the Return of all things to God, Eriugena is able to lay his hands on no Biblical passage to match the Genesis accounts of creation and Fall, his starting point when it comes to the Return is nonetheless Scriptural. The notion of the Return of all things to God is ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> II 539D-540A: *non autem alium finem mundi huius sensibilis... esse futurum nisi in deum ... reditum.*

<sup>2</sup> V 909D



Pauline, deriving from the Apostle's claim that, "God will be all in all" (*Deus erit omnia in omibus*: I Cor. 15:28). But Eriugena takes from Paul more than the underlying concept of the Return, in fact the basis for Eriugena's detailed account of death and resurrection is solidly Pauline. Eriugena cites I Cor. 15: 43-44: "it is sown an animal body, it will rise a spiritual body" six times in the *Periphyseon*, three times in Book V alone. As shall become clear over the following analysis, this passage informs a great deal of Eriugena's thinking about death, about the human body, and its *post mortem* existence.

And much of what Eriugena will have to say in Book V concerning death and the Return of all things derives from Paul's description of living and dying in Christ as it is expressed in Romans 6:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

It could be argued that Paul's notion of death here is ambiguous. By 'death' does he actually mean us to understand a life led free of sin, a death to the sensible world? Or does he mean the physical death of the body? The same ambiguity is also present in Eriugena's notion of death and resurrection. Even a cursory reading of Book V reveals a tension between, as it were, the brute facts concerning the death and dissolution of the body, and the dialectical metaphysics that Eriugena deploys in

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<sup>3</sup> Rom. 6: 5-11; Vulgate version: *si enim conplantati facti sumus similitudini mortis eius, simul et resurrectionis erimus. hoc scientes quia vetus homo noster simul crucifixus est ut destruat corpus peccati ut ultra non serviamus peccato. qui enim mortuus est iustificatus est a peccato. si autem mortui sumus cum Christo credimus quia simul etiam vivemus cum Christo scientes quod Christus surgens ex mortuis iam non moritur mors illi ultra non dominabitur quod enim mortuus est peccato mortuus est semel quod autem vivit vivit Deo ita et vos existimate vos mortuos quidem esse peccato viventes autem Deo in Christo Iesu.*



articulating his theory of the Return. At points it reads as though the Alumnus and the Nutritior are arguing past each other, each having a different definition of death, the Alumnus sticking to a physicalist, commonsensical understanding of the term, the Nutritior expressing a Pauline, ascetical notion of death as death to the world.<sup>4</sup> Eriugena will argue, without denying the reality of bodily death, that the death of the body is actually the beginning of the Return, and therefore a boon. True death, however, is the enslavement of human nature in the sensible and corporeal. And from this enslavement human nature is able to free itself through the acceptance of God's Grace, turning back towards the Creator. Confusingly perhaps, this turning back to God is itself conceived by Eriugena (following Paul) as death, or rather as the death of death.

For if the sages are right in giving the name of death to this mortal life which is spent in the corruptible flesh, why should the end of that life be called death, when it does not so much bring death to the dying as liberation from death?<sup>5</sup>

Death is a denial, or rather an absolute contradiction of its opposite, life. If, therefore, it is wrong to conceive of sensible existence or this life as a good, and the taking away of that good or life as an evil, it follows that death is the good, and sensible existence or life the evil. The values commonly attached to life and death must be reversed. This paradox lies at the heart of Eriugena's notion of death and resurrection. Before proceeding to a detailed examination of the death and resurrection of the body in the *Periphyseon*, it is necessary to give an account of what, in general terms, Eriugena means by the Return.

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<sup>4</sup> That turning towards God (and therefore away from the world) is a form of death, or akin to death would have been a familiar trope to Eriugena. See Paschasius Radbertus, *In Mat.* 3.5: (PL 120, 223AB): *idcirco verae beatudinis amator ab omni labentium rerum iucunditate sese extrahat, et avertens se convertatur ad dilectionem aeternorum. Contempletur ex desiderio incommutabilem et immensam unitatem Dei, eademque Trinitatem Deitatis incapabilem fidei intellectu comprehendat. Ob cuius amorem, expletis gradibus ab omni strepitu rerum, et appetitu concupiscentiarum alienam se faciat, quoad possit videre Deum, quantum potest ab his qui huic saeculo moriuntur. Hunc itaque tantum quisque videt in quantum saeculo moritur.*

<sup>5</sup> V 875C



## I : The Return

Whereas the downward movement, conceived either as creation or as Fall, had as its cause the efficient component of the four-part division of nature – that which creates but is not created (*creat et non creatur*),<sup>6</sup> the Return has the Final cause – that which neither creates nor is created.

For every division, which is called by the Greeks μέρισμος, seems to be a kind of descent from some finite unity down into an infinite number of individuals, that is to say, from the most general to the most specific, while every recollection, which is like a return back, starting from the most specific and ascending to the most general is called ἀναλυτική. Thus it is the return and resolution of individuals into forms, of forms into genera, of genera into οὐσίαι, of οὐσίαι into the Wisdom and Providence with which every division begins and in which every division ends.<sup>7</sup>

For Eriugena the teleological ‘direction’ of the Return is away from diversity and towards simplicity;<sup>8</sup> a reversal of the cause and effect relation.

The unformed matter which was created out of nothing and from which the structure of this sensible world, by the diversity of the forms impressed upon it, is composed: this matter he shall burn up like hay, when it shall be sanctified, that is purged, in that nature that was made in the Image of God, so that nothing material or temporal, or earthly or visible, or transitory or mutable shall remain in it for it shall be totally changed into spiritual stability and oneness.<sup>9</sup>

There are a number of by now familiar Eriugenian notions given expression here, namely, that unformed matter is created from nothing,<sup>10</sup> that diversity of forms (QFs) accounts for sensible diversity,<sup>11</sup> that all creation is effected through and in Man.<sup>12</sup>

Also apparent is Eriugena’s low estimation of corporeal nature; it is this nature, or

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<sup>6</sup> I 441B

<sup>7</sup> II 526BC. This passage could stand as an abstract for the *Periphyseon* as a whole. The twelfth century MS (Trinity College 0.5.20) which Thomas Gale used for his edition of 1681 is entitled *Peri Physeos Merismou* and translated as *De Divisione Naturae*. See I. P. Sheldon-Williams, “The Title of Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*” *Studia Patristica* 3 (Leipzig, 1961) pp. 297-302.

<sup>8</sup> V 953A: *nos qui in hac vita compositi sumus, in simplicem quandam unitatem adunabimur*.

<sup>9</sup> V 960D

<sup>10</sup> III 636D

<sup>11</sup> III 701A. Note that qualitative difference accounts for sensible diversity but is not the locus of individuality.

<sup>12</sup> For example, IV 764A: *totus iste mundus sensibilis in ipso [sc. homine] conditus est. nulla enim pars eius invenitur sive corporea, sive incorporea, quae non in homine creata subsistat*.



rather man's debased relationship with this nature, that accounts for the difference between the sensible world and Paradise. The list of adjectives – material, temporal, earthly, visible, transitory, mutable – all seem to stand in a relation of mutual entailment; it is impossible for an object to display just one (or several) of these characteristics and not to display all. The actual Return, according to this passage, is a process of purgation and then transformation into spiritual stability and oneness.

This Return is conceived by Eriugena under three aspects (*modus*). There is the general Return which consists in the transformation of the whole of sensible creation, of all bodies, so that there is no body remaining in nature. All is ultimately intelligible substance, subsisting within its cause. The second aspect of the Return concerns the saving of human nature by Christ. Human nature, through the mediating role of Christ, is returned to its original created dignity. The third aspect concerns the return path of those who,

besides ascending to the highest point of the nature which is created in them, shall, through the abundance of the Grace of God, which is supplied through Christ and in Christ to His elect, pass beyond the laws and limitations of nature and on that superessential plane be transformed into God Himself.<sup>13</sup>

As I have already stated, there is no room in an analysis of body and material substance to examine in any detail the subsistence of deiform human nature on the superessential plane. But it is under this third aspect of the Return that Eriugena discusses the ascension of corporeal human nature into the intelligible realm.

As a conclusion to his discussion of the categories of place and time in Book I, Eriugena argues that, as opposed to the necessarily spatio-temporal existence in this world, the coming beatitude shall be infinite.

Those who participate in the eternal beatitude will be encompassed neither by place nor time... For all who shall return into their eternal reasons which have

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<sup>13</sup> V 1020C. These three *modus* are conceived by Eriugena as offering different perspectives on the same process. In a sense, as I understand it, the second and third aspects are species of the first, general Return.



neither a beginning of time through generation in place and time, nor an end through dissolution, and are not defined by any local position so that only their eternal reasons, and nothing else, will be in them. For being infinite they will to infinity adhere to the Cause of all things. Not that their nature perishes in them, but that in them He alone is manifest Who alone truly is.<sup>14</sup>

In this passage are found a number of the points already sketched: firstly, the Return is conceived as a return to reasons. Secondly, the return is described as a stripping away of categorial differences. Here only place and time are mentioned, but elsewhere the other categories are also denied of the returned nature.<sup>15</sup> All the categories that is, except Substance. For Eriugena, the Return is defined as a passing into substance.<sup>16</sup> And furthermore, *ousia* is, in its peculiarly Eriugenian sense, precisely that nature from which man has fallen and into which he shall return.<sup>17</sup> It is, therefore, identical to the “eternal reasons” mentioned in the passage quoted above.

For our nature shall be purified, the vice shall be winnowed away, the grain, which is our substance, shall be stored, the stubble, which is sin, shall burn in the flame of Divine Judgement, the places hid in darkness shall be illumined, and God shall be seen as all in all.<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, what remains after this stripping away of categorial difference is a nature in which are to be found only the eternal reasons and in which nothing is manifest except God. Without pre-empting the findings of this chapter, we can already conceive in outline this process as the individual substance’s identity to the specific substance no longer marred by the adherence of QFs.

In order to “return” somewhere, we must, at some previous point in time, have been there. So, for Eriugena,

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<sup>14</sup> I 482D-483A

<sup>15</sup> V 884B: *moles itaque terrena, mortalis, fluxilis, quae ex diversis qualitatibus sensibilibus elementorum et assumpta et composita est sub forma hac quae sensibus corporeis succumbit... solvetur, et in melius mutabitur, in spiritum stabilemque substantiam.*

<sup>16</sup> V 993AB: *omne, quod in hoc mundo sensibile et locale et temporale, omneque mutabilitate obnoxium perituum, hoc est transitorium in ipsam substantiam, hoc est, naturam.*

<sup>17</sup> I 492D: *ὀυσία cuius est quantum corpus, immortalis inseparabilisque sua propria naturalique virtute perdurat.*

<sup>18</sup> V 1016A



the end of [the sensible world] also is its beginning, which it seeks and in which it will rest when it has found it; a rest which will not consist in the abolition of its substance, but the return into those “reasons” whence it sprang.<sup>19</sup>

That which is both the beginning of the sensible world and its end is clearly God; God is both the beginning and end of all things, both efficient and final cause.<sup>20</sup> Thus, since both divisions correspond to one subject, “the beginning does not differ from the end but is one and the same.”<sup>21</sup> For this reason, the teleological movement is characterised as a ‘return.’

Because it is to the same Cause that all things that proceed from it shall return when they reach their end, it is therefore called the end of all things and is said neither to create nor to be created. For once all things have returned to it nothing further will proceed from it by generation in place and time and genera and forms since in it all things will be at rest and will remain an indivisible and immutable One.<sup>22</sup>

This pattern of procession and return is to be found also in the whole of created nature. Eriugena offers several illustrations from the liberal arts. For example, arithmetic is concerned with the descent of the Monad into the “different species of numbers.”<sup>23</sup> Likewise, geometry begins with a point or *signum*<sup>24</sup> from which it is possible to construct planes, solid figures, surfaces and so on. But all these are resolvable back to the point in which they subsisted and continue to subsist potentially.<sup>25</sup> He offers similar illustrations from music, astronomy and dialectic.<sup>26</sup> In

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<sup>19</sup> V 866D. The seeking of the sensible for the intelligible is a reflection at a global level of the appetitive process that takes place throughout the hierarchy of genus, species and individuals. E.g. V 916A: *non enim naturalis ratio sinit superiora in inferiora mutari, inferiora vero superiora naturaliter appetunt eisque volunt adunari.*

<sup>20</sup> V 870CD; Cf. I 441B – 442A; II 526C: *prima nanque et quarta unum sunt quoniam de deo solummodo intelliguntur. Est enim principium omnium quae a se condita sunt et finis omnium quae eum appetunt ut in eo aeternaliter immutabiliterque quiescant.*

<sup>21</sup> V 892D

<sup>22</sup> II 527A

<sup>23</sup> V 869A

<sup>24</sup> ‘*Signum*’ is Eriugena’s translation of *σημεῖον*.

<sup>25</sup> See I 465D: *in ipso [i.e. deo] enim omnia et stant, hoc est immutabiliter secundum suas rationes subsistunt, et iacent, hoc est quiescunt; finis enim omnium est, ultra quem nihil appetunt.*

<sup>26</sup> His use of the illustration from dialectic is perhaps consciously circular since it is by means of dialectic that he aims to prove his case. Dialectic is both the means and the end.



respect of the resurrection of the human substance the process is summarised by the Alumnus as follows:

The passing of mortal bodies into immortal, of corruptible into incorruptible, of animal into spiritual, and of spatio-temporal into eternal bodies free from all local limitation.<sup>27</sup>

And the Nutritor is pleased by his pupil's summary, and takes satisfaction in his own paedagogical success: "This is what I wished to convince you of, and I see that I have succeeded."

As was noted in the previous chapter, the Fall is essentially regarded by Eriugena as the addition to created nature of corporeality. And the addition is made on account of man's sin. The converse is true of the Return; by means of the natural appetite of all inferior things for their superiors, and by God's Grace, the resurrection shall take the form of a subtraction, a stripping away of multiplicity:

Every substance shall be purged of its corruptible accidents and free from all things which do not pertain to the state of its proper nature, its indissoluble simplicity.<sup>28</sup>

So the Return is to be seen as undoing the effects of the Fall, or rather a returning of the effects into their causes. And since all things have their being through the reasons or causes by which they exist, the Return is effectively a return to being.<sup>29</sup>

The relation of the Return to the Fall raises a question that needs to be addressed at the outset since it concerns the scope of the discussion. The obvious point has already been made that in order to return somewhere, one must at a previous time have been there. But it was found in the last chapter that the substance of man – the interior or spiritual man – abides eternally and immutably in its cause. How is it possible therefore to return to a place you never left? After all it is surely impossible

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<sup>27</sup> V 906C

<sup>28</sup> III 666A: *omnis substantia ab omnibus corruptibilibus accidentibus purgabitur et ab omnibus quae ad statum suae propriae naturae non attinent absolvetur, solis naturalibus virtutibus decora insolubili simplicitate.*

<sup>29</sup> For things having their being through their reasons / causes see II 575D; II 616B-D; 622C; III 627C.



for there to be any movement, downward or upward, forward or backwards for an eternal and immutable substance? And Eriugena goes so far as to admit that this is the case:

This Return of which we are now speaking will not be a Return of substances, for these remain immutably and indissolubly what they always were, but of the qualities and quantities and other accidents, which of themselves are unstable and transient, subject to the conditions of space and time, susceptible to birth and decay.<sup>30</sup>

Restricting our examination of the Return to body and material substance turns out not to be a restriction at all. The Return consists solely in the return of the body or more accurately, the properties of body, into its causes. Let us now turn to an examination of the Return itself.

Near the opening of Book Five, Eriugena offers a five stage Return.<sup>31</sup> Let us call this Model A.

#### Model A

- 1) The first stage corresponds to the death and corruption of the body. The body suffers dissolution and returns to the four elements of which the sensible world is composed.
- 2) At the Resurrection each person shall have restored to them their body. This restoration is made from out of the four elements.
- 3) Body is changed into soul.
- 4) The soul (which is now the whole human nature) returns to the Primordial Causes.  
And these causes, as we have seen, reside immutably in God.
- 5) The spirit with its causes is absorbed into God. There is nothing left but God. God will be all things in all things.

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<sup>30</sup> V 885C

<sup>31</sup> V 876AB



And at the very end of Book Five Eriugena offers another, seven stage analysis of the Return.<sup>32</sup>

### Model B

- 1) Earthly body is transformed into vital motion.
- 2) Vital motion is transformed into sensation.
- 3) Sensation is transformed into reason.
- 4) Reason is transformed into mind. And the reason is the end of every rational creature.

These four stages mark the first part of the ascent, the lower natures becoming absorbed into the higher natures. This first part of the Return takes place, as it were, within the creature. As Eriugena points out, reason is the end of every rational creature. But there now follow three more stages of the ascent (*tres ascensionis gradus*) that mark the ascending relation between creature and creator.

- 5) The mind is transformed into the knowledge of all things that come after God.
- 6) The knowledge of all things that come after God is transformed into wisdom, that is the innermost contemplation of the Truth insofar as that is possible for the creature.
- 7) “The supernatural merging of the perfectly purified souls into God Himself, and their entry into the darkness of incomprehensible and inaccessible Light (1 Tim. 6:16) which conceals the Cause of all things.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> V 1020C – 1021A

<sup>33</sup> V 1021A: *in ipsum Deum supernaturaliter occasus, ac veluti incomprehensibilis et inaccessibilis lucis tenebrae in quibus causae omnium absconditur*. For Eriugena’s claim that *tenebras recte cognoscentium convertit in lucem* (the last words of the *Periphyseon* - V 1022C) see Carabine, Deidre, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, *Proceedings of the Dublin Conference on Neoplatonism, 1992*, pp. 43-56, esp. 49-53.



Although this is a sevenfold ascent, it comprises eight stages. Firstly, body, vital motion, sense, reason and mind, and then a further three: knowledge, wisdom, and God.

Human nature shall through the eight stages of its ascent return into its Principle. Five of those stages lie within the limits of nature, while three lie beyond nature and beyond being in God Himself. Then the fivefold number of the creature shall be united with the threefold number of the Creator.<sup>34</sup>

Stages 5), 6) and 7), the stages that lie outside of nature, will be of less interest to us here. It also follows from Eriugena's statement made at V 885C (quoted above) that steps 5), 6) and 7) do not strictly belong to the Return; the Return does not comprise substances since substances remain immutably, indivisibly and eternally the same.

The last three stages of Model B, therefore, remain outside the scope of the Return as it is generally understood, and refer to a mystical 'drawing up' of the substantial human nature into God. Of primary concern in a discussion of body are the first few stages of Models A and B. Let us turn, therefore, to the subject of death and corruption.

## **II : Death and Dissolution**

In the last chapter I claimed that a recognition of the Fall and our fallen nature was a necessary first step on the Return. This claim appears to be contradicted by the first propositions on both models. In the case of Model A, the death of the body and its dissolution is listed as the beginning of the Return. And according to Model B the first step is the passage from earthly body to vital motion. So where does this leave the earlier claim that a recognition of our fallen nature marks the first step in the Return? Later in this chapter I aim to show that this claim need not be abandoned since Eriugena identifies the recognition of our fallen nature with death itself.

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<sup>34</sup> V 1021AB



For the sake of argument, therefore, let us accept for now Model A's assertion that the death and subsequent dissolution of the body is the beginning of the Return. Death becomes, therefore, a turning point in Eriugena's dialectic of procession and return. It represents the fulcrum on which the whole edifice of *natura* is balanced. At the moment of death, the balance tips; the Fall ceases, and the Return begins. As has already been noted, the end point of the Fall, and the first point of the Return are identical. Now it is possible to identify this moment with the death of the physical body:

It is from this lowest depth of his Fall that the Return begins. This lowest depth of the Fall is the dissolution of the body. Therefore the dissolution of the body is the starting point of the Return of nature.<sup>35</sup>

Let us look a little more closely, therefore, at what Eriugena means by dissolution. Eriugena assumes that the dissolution of the body is total:

If in this corporeal and dissoluble matter there should be any single, immutable, and quite indissoluble essence, then it could not be wholly dissolved by any thought or action. But in fact it is dissolved: therefore there is nothing in it which is indissoluble.<sup>36</sup>

Matter is, therefore, the Nutritor concludes, "nothing else but a certain composition of accidents."<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, however, Eriugena has returned to this passage and qualified it with an insertion to the Reims MS. The insertion reads as follows:

The accidents themselves remain without change in their own natures (*in sua natura*) for the reason that underlying them all there is something indivisible in which they naturally (*naturaliter*) subsist as one.<sup>38</sup>

It seems entirely plausible to suppose that this insertion was made after the composition of Book V, or at least after reflection on the material and subject matter that comprises Book V. The motivation behind the insertion seems to be the retention of the possibility of bodily resurrection. Holding to the view that accidents remain

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<sup>35</sup> V 875C

<sup>36</sup> I 479C

<sup>37</sup> I 479B: *nil aliud... materiam... nisi accidentium quandam compositionem.*

<sup>38</sup> I 479C



immutable in their natures allows Eriugena to maintain that the material, exterior body, though dissoluble into its constituent elements, also continues somehow to subsist in its nature(s). How is this possible? What is that nature in which the accidents immutably subsist? In order to answer these questions it will be necessary to examine Eriugena's theory of the resurrection of the body.

i) The resurrection of the body:

Eriugena is committed to the orthodox Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The souls waiting in purgatory for the Day of Judgement will, "take back their bodies."<sup>39</sup> But when asked by the Alumnus whether, "physical objects which are extended in space and time and composed of many different parts... are to be included in the general resurrection?"<sup>40</sup> the Nutritor makes the following assertion:

We do not say that the masses and forms of visible and sensible bodies will be resurrected, but that in the resurrection of man... they will return with man and in man into their Causes and principles which were created in man.<sup>41</sup>

How does this passage compare with the insertion to Book I (I 479C)? Firstly, are they *about* the same thing? In the insertion to Book I Eriugena is discussing accidents; in the Book V passage he refers to, "masses and forms of visible and sensible bodies." The accidents in Book I are those of the ten categories – namely Quantity, Quality, Situation and Condition – that come together, commingle and constitute visible matter, and are normally perceived by the bodily sense. In order to be perceivable this agglomeration of accidents must also have form. This is the qualitative or material form.<sup>42</sup> It seems licit, therefore, to identify the masses and forms of visible and sensible bodies mentioned in the Book V passage with the matter and qualitative

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<sup>39</sup> IV 858A: *donec corpora sua recipient [sc. animae].*

<sup>40</sup> V 913C

<sup>41</sup> V 913CD

<sup>42</sup> III 703B: *forma vero illa materiae adhaerens ad constitutionem corporis varia semper atque mutabilis inque diversas differentias secundum accidens dispersa.*



forms (QFs) of the Book I insertion. These forms and masses, although they shall not be included in the resurrection *as they are*, shall return, “with man and into their causes.” In Book I this return is not referred to as a process, the accidents, “remain without change in their own natures.” If the masses and forms of the Book V passage are identical to the accidents that remain changeless in their own natures, how is it that they *return*? Surely they can never have left? The qualitative or material forms, in virtue of which individual bodies are sensible and dissimilar one from another proceed from those things that

are understood about it [viz the specific substance, eg. Man], namely from places and times, from generation, from the quantity and quality of their diets, their habitats, the conditions under which each was born, and, to speak generally, from all things which are understood about the substance and are not the substance itself.<sup>43</sup>

Despite this somewhat peculiar list, these things, “understood about substance” are clearly the ten categories minus *Ousia*, or Substance. Indeed Eriugena explicitly states that “the other nine categories are about it [sc. Οὐσίᾱ] or within it.”<sup>44</sup> It seems, therefore, that these accidental sensible differences *proceed* from the categories in the same way that an effect proceeds from its cause. Visible matter and *a fortiori* bodies are effects of invisible causes.<sup>45</sup> The causes are the categories, and since that upon which the nine non-substantial categories depend is itself immaterial, so the categories, “are incorporeal when considered in themselves.”<sup>46</sup> When considered in themselves, that is when considered as causes, they are incorporeal. When considered as effects they come together to form visible bodies. The ‘consideration’ is crucial.

The components of visible bodies can either be in themselves eternally subsistent

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<sup>43</sup> III 703C: *ex his quae circa eam [sc. substantiam vel naturam] intelliguntur contingit, ex locis videlicet temporibusque ex generatione ex quantitate et qualitate alimoniorum regionum rerum in quibus quisque nascitur et, ut universaliter dicam, ex omniibus quae circa substantiam intelliguntur et non ipsa substantia sunt.*

<sup>44</sup> I 478D

<sup>45</sup> I 479B

<sup>46</sup> I 478D – 479A



causes (unproceeded categories) or instantiated in visible matter, “dispersed among diverse differences by accident,”<sup>47</sup> depending on the point of view of the person ‘considering’. Taking into account ‘consideration’ will also answer our earlier question as to the possibility of returning to a place we never left. Considered as substance, or as abiding within its causes there can be no return, it seems. Considered from the point of view of its accidental differences or effects, then there is a return journey to be made. But the picture is slightly more complex than this. In fact, Eriugena wants to say, the act of consideration is itself the locus either of the Fall or the Return: to consider an object as to its sensible accidental differences is to express the Fall, to consider an object as to its eternal, immutable substance, as ever-abiding within the causes that themselves subsist as a unity within the Word, is to express the Return.

This dependence on point of view or consideration also explains the difference between the passages under discussion. In the Book I insertion – part of a general metaphysical survey – the categories are being considered *in themselves*; in Book V Eriugena is concerned with detailing the process whereby fallen nature is restored or returned to its created perfection. And yet both passages are fundamentally concerned with the same subject: the relation of material effect to immaterial cause.

So the, “masses and forms of visible and sensible bodies” are not resurrected in themselves, but in Man. Just as male and female are absorbed into the simplicity of our sexless simple nature, so our sensible bodies will be absorbed into our spiritual Cause. Unable, as yet, to identify this absorption or reversion with the idea of resurrection, the Alumnus is confused. He fails to see how something can be said to perish when it continues to reside eternally in the primordial causes:

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<sup>47</sup> III 703B



I should like to ask you why we say that a thing perishes when we know that it will return into its own Primordial Causes, and indeed into God Himself. It should rather be said of it that it lives forever, than that it dies and passes away.<sup>48</sup>

The solution to the Alumnus's problem lies in Eriugena's identification of the Return with the Resurrection. Eriugena is committed to the view that the body is resurrected:

- 1) The resurrection of the body. The restoration of the body from the four elements.

The body, on dying, is dissolved into its constituent elements, and scattered. How is it possible for the soul to recover its body? Eriugena believes that

the impression (*species*) of that other body, the material and dissoluble, abides in the soul, not only during life but even after dissolution and returns into the elements of the world... Therefore the soul cannot forget or cease to know her parts wherever among the elements they may be scattered.<sup>49</sup>

The translation of 'impression' for '*species*' is unexpected. At points Eriugena uses '*species*' as a synonym of '*forma*'.<sup>50</sup> If we substitute 'form' for 'impression' it becomes clear that Eriugena intends here to refer to the QF, "that form (*forma*) which is joined to matter so as to constitute body."<sup>51</sup> It is this form that abides in the soul even after the dissolution of the body. How this is possible is partially explained by means of the seal / impression analogy. Eriugena argues that the relationship between the exterior and interior bodies is analogous to that between a seal and its impression. Thus the exterior body leaves a permanent impression on the interior. Indeed, the impression

remains always in the soul, even after the dissolution of the seal, because of that notion of it, which it always retains, recalls the parts of the seal, scattered as they may be throughout the elements, and recalls that, at the day of the Resurrection, they are to be formed again in the seal (that is, in the body) to the form of the soul (which is the interior body.)<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> V 897B

<sup>49</sup> IV 802BC

<sup>50</sup> For example at I 442A

<sup>51</sup> III 703B

<sup>52</sup> IV 802D-803A



This is at best only a partial explanation since Eriugena is able to shed no light on the means whereby the interior body or soul is able to retain a memory or notion of the exterior, dissoluble body. After all, the interior body is “simple and indivisible”;<sup>53</sup> and it subsists as substance, “immutably without transformation.”<sup>54</sup> It is difficult to see how the QF remains in this simple, immutable substance when Eriugena has characterised the visible, material form or species (QF) as, “always varying and changeable.”<sup>55</sup> But, although the QF is in a perpetual state of flux, it nevertheless seems to act as some sort of organising principle. When the Alumnus asks what it is that shall be included in the general resurrection, he poses the question in the following way:

Are then the physical objects which are extended in space and time and composed of many different parts, as well as the visible forms (*visibiles species*) by which they are prevented from coalescing into one indeterminate mass, to be included in the general resurrection?<sup>56</sup>

The ‘visible forms’ cannot be other than the QFs or species. Clearly they act here as an organising principle, or that through which the soul is able to recall the parts of the exterior and material body that have been dissolved into the constituent elements. It is the QF that prevents physical objects, “coalescing into one indeterminate mass.” The QFs, as a multiplex procession from a simple Cause, are essentially distributive; they give rise to difference. QF is the *definiens* of sensible matter and body, “for whatever becomes manifest becomes manifest through form.”<sup>57</sup> And bodies are bodies only inasmuch as they are perceivable to the senses.<sup>58</sup> But they are also processions or

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<sup>53</sup> IV 760A; V 941D – 942A; V 922AB

<sup>54</sup> V 884A

<sup>55</sup> III 703B

<sup>56</sup> V 913C

<sup>57</sup> I 479B

<sup>58</sup> I 479AB



effects of a simple substantial cause. In themselves, therefore, they are incorporeal, and indeed *are* only inasmuch as they continue to subsist in their cause.

But if this is the case one may straightaway ask, how does the resurrected human being retain its identity if it is absorbed into its Cause? Eriugena is never quite able to abandon the view that individuation is effected by means of qualitative, sensible form. Perhaps the answer lies, therefore, in the mysterious association between the substance and the qualities that invest it, between the interior and exterior, the impression and the seal.

I do not believe that these qualities of the substances wholly abandon the substances upon which they depend so as entirely to immerse themselves in the matter of the sensible world: but in a miraculous and mysterious manner known to their Creator alone they continue to remain associated with their substances in an inseparable bond.<sup>59</sup>

The manner in which this substance – simple and immutable in itself – retains an impression (*species*) of the exterior body that is changeable and susceptible of dissolution is inexplicable. And this is unsatisfactory; one cannot help feeling that the individuality of the substance is retained by Eriugena simply to keep his thinking in line with orthodox Christian teaching concerning the resurrection of the body.

## ii) Death and Ignorance:

When questioned as to the imperishable nature of all that subsists within the Word, the Alumnus confirms his belief that

if I am not in Him I cannot be at all. And if I do not know this I am brought into the death of folly and ignorance.<sup>60</sup>

Earlier the Nutritor has elaborated on the results of this deathly ignorance:

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<sup>59</sup> V 886D: *nec sic tamen praedictas substantiarum qualitates suas substantias, circa quas volvuntur, omnino deserere, et in materiem sensibilis mundi convenire arbitramur, sed mirabili et ineffabili modo, soli fabricatori illius cognito, et circa suas substantias, quibus inseparabiliter adhaerent, semper permanent.*

<sup>60</sup> V 910C



For there is no worse death than ignorance of the truth, no deeper pitfall than taking the false for the true, which is the property of error. For from these the basest and foulest monsters are wont to be fabricated in human thoughts, and when the carnal soul loves and pursues these as though they were real, turning its back on the true light and desiring but unable to embrace fleeting shadows, it is wont to plunge into the depth of misery.<sup>61</sup>

The language here recalls the description of the Fall in Book IV. The base and foul monsters that are fabricated in human thought, are the product of man's fallen nature; they are the superficial and beguiling phantasies of a warped sense faculty; they are shadows, unreal.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, they are death conceived of as ignorance of the truth. But these phantasies are the diversity of the sensible forms (QFs) that comprise the material world, or rather our fallen experience of the material world. They are taken, erroneously according to Eriugena, to be the experience of life.

If death is actually the mistake made by man in embracing the fleshly life given in punishment for sin, then the first step on the return journey is the correction of that mistake. This correction may be effected either by the physical death of the body, or by an acceptance of Truth through knowledge. What is the relationship between death and knowledge?

In virtue of its pivotal position within the dialectic of procession and return, death is given a profoundly paradoxical definition in the *Periphyseon*. Indeed the word 'death' seems to include as part of its meaning its own contrary: life. Death, on the one hand is the ignorance of Truth, or life led in thrall to sensible appearance. But on the other, it is also the death of this life, and so its own contradiction, the death of death: true life, or knowledge. 'Death' refers to false life or ignorance of truth. It also refers to the true life, or knowledge of the truth. In this second aspect, there is clearly a protreptic dimension to Eriugena's notion of death. For the Nutritor, death is desirable inasmuch as it represents a turning back to God. The dialectical

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<sup>61</sup> III 650A

<sup>62</sup> Compare the passage at III 683D where again the sense data are referred to as 'shadows'.



understanding of the body and its death is at once the means whereby the relationship between Creator and creation is expressed, and the means whereby the final resolution is effected. This resolution is brought about through a realignment of fallen nature into a state of Grace. Let us examine more closely this second aspect of death, death as true life or knowledge.

In order to strengthen his understanding of death, the Nutritor cites the Pseudo-Dionysius's interpretation of the text, "Right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 115:15). Eriugena understands the Pseudo-Dionysius as claiming that the death of the saints refers to, "nothing less than their ascent into God through the loftiness of their contemplation whereby, though still in the body, they have transcended all things visible and invisible."<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the Nutritor asks,

was not John the Evangelist dead to all created things when he transcended all things by the loftiness of his contemplation (*theoriae*)?<sup>64</sup>

For the Nutritor, therefore, death is understood as transcendence, a 'dying to the world,' achieved through contemplation:

And just as those who are filled with virtue and wisdom even while they are still established in this world die in their mind, though not with their body, so shall it be with the whole world at its consummation.<sup>65</sup>

According to the Nutritor, therefore, 'death' refers primarily to a state of mind, a state of mind that is described in the first passage as 'lofty contemplation', and in the second as 'virtuous and wise'. Eriugena thinks of contemplation as the end of wisdom:

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<sup>63</sup> V 897B. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* III, 9 (PG3 437BC). For Eriugena's translation of this passage see PL 122 1085C – 1086A. Pseudo-Dionysius states that the saints and their followers are οὐ νεκρωθέντας, ἀλλὰ εἰς θειοτατην ζωὴν ἐκ θανάτου μεταφοιτησαντας.

<sup>64</sup> V 897C

<sup>65</sup> V 897CD. Cf. IV 753B: *nam qui perfecte vivit, omnino corpus suum, et vitam qua illud administratur, omnesque corporeos sensus cum his quae per eos percipit, omnesque irrationabiles motus quos in se sentit cum omnium rerum mutabilium memoria, non solum spernit, verum etiam, quantum potest, et corrumpit et destruit, ne ullo modo in eo praevaliant, et omnino perire eis et ea sibi appetit.* Note that according to this passage right-living (*perfecte vivit*) consists in striving to die to the flesh; it is in the moral agent's will that the 'death' that is perfect life is to be found, not the body.



For if we are unwilling to learn and know about ourselves that means that we have no desire to return to that which is above ourselves, namely our proper cause, and shall continue to wallow in the bed of carnal matter and the death of ignorance. For there is no other way to the most pure contemplation (*contemplationem*) of the First Cause than certain knowledge of Its image which comes after it.<sup>66</sup>

It follows that to be *filled with* virtue and wisdom is to achieve the point in the philosophical ascent at which contemplation becomes possible. And this point presumably corresponds to,

4) Reason is transformed into mind,

of Model B. Eriugena suggests that those who, through being filled with virtue and wisdom, that is, through contemplation, are able to “die in the mind” can embark on the Return before bodily death. The Nutritor compares those who are capable of this death with the state of the world at its consummation.<sup>67</sup> Each one of its parts shall be returned to its Cause. The clear implication is that this is possible for the individual who is dead *to* the world but who is still established *in* the world. The Nutritor rules out the possibility of illumination, purgation and perfection, the final three stages of the Return that correspond to stages 5), 6) and 7) on Model B prior to the physical death of the body.

The possibility of “death in the mind”, the death of the contemplative, raises a number of questions. Are the Nutritor and the Alumnus talking past one another? The Alumnus is clearly exercised by the idea of bodily death and resurrection and how the latter is to be effected. The Nutritor on the other hand seems to understand by ‘death’ the ascetic’s withdrawal from the world. Is it the case that there are two deaths, or two aspects of death under discussion, one of which is open only to those who are filled with virtue and wisdom, and the other open to all? Not necessarily. According to

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<sup>66</sup> V 941C. For *contemplatio / theoria* as the goal of philosophy see Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 147. See also Leclercq, J., *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God. A Study of Monastic Culture* (SPCK, 1978) pp. 126-7.

<sup>67</sup> V 897D



Model A, death and the corruption of the body mark the first stage in the Return. But Model B makes no mention of death, only the transformation of the earthly body into vital motion, of vital motion into sensation, sensation into reason. These Model B stages do not appear to require the death of the body, only its transformation. They seem to refer, therefore, to the process whereby, through learning and knowing about ourselves, we return to our proper cause, that is, to created human nature, our substance, Man. This transformation, it is now possible to conclude, is identical to the death of the mind Eriugena mentions in the earlier passage. It is the mind's turning away from the gross sensible world and back to God, Who is the substance of all things.<sup>68</sup>

To return again to the Models of the Return, it is possible now to see that the third stage of Model A:

3) Body is changed into soul,

corresponds to stages 1) to 4) of Model B. Stage 3) on Model A follows,

2) The death and corruption of the body. The body suffers dissolution and returns to the four elements.

3) The resurrection of the body. The restoration of the body from the four elements.

It seems, therefore, that the contemplative who is 'dead to the world,' who returns along the path indicated by Model B, is not strictly required to suffer bodily death, dissolution and restoration, since his or her body is already 'transformed.' Eriugena makes no claim to the effect that the contemplative will not as a matter of fact suffer bodily death. Death is, however, presumably nothing to the contemplative since they have already effectively died *to* their bodies, if not actually *in* them.

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<sup>68</sup> For God as substance of all things: I 516C; III 671B; III 681D; V 956B.



Although ‘death’ appears to have contradictory meanings for the Nutritor and the Alumnus, in both cases it marks the passing of the body. This can be understood physically or in the ‘higher’ sense as a turning away from the diverse sensible creation towards the simple intelligible Cause.

### iii) The Scope of the Return:

First of all it must be noted that the Return is conceived by Eriugena – after the Pauline formulation – as being a return of *all things* to God. That said, however, Eriugena endorses the Church position that the world was brought into being in time and it shall be brought to an end. Everything which comes into being in the world and is composed of the stuff of the world must of necessity be dissolved and pass away with the world. Does this include material substance and the body? Eriugena believes there is nothing of the human being that is not resurrected since, “nothing exists in human nature which is not spiritual and intelligible.”<sup>69</sup> Does it follow from this statement that nothing – not even the material body – perishes? No, clearly not, for ‘human nature’ refers to the unfallen substance of man; it categorically does not include within its scope the corporeal accretions accrued to it as punishment for sin.

The exterior, material body shall pass away:

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.” (Mat. 24:35) And lest anyone should suppose that these words can mean that the passing away of the world is from one place to another place, or from one time to another time, or from one visible form to another visible form, or from one quality to another quality, or from one quantity to another quantity, let him consider the way in which the Prophet addresses the Creator of the World: “The heavens are the works of Thy hands; they shall perish, but Thou remainest.” (Ps. 101:26-27; Hebr. 1:10-11) By using this unequivocal phrase, “They shall perish,” he makes clear the meaning of “They shall pass away.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> V 878D – 879A: *in humana siquidem natura nil subsistit quod spirituale et intelligibile non sit.*

<sup>70</sup> V 890D – 891A



By means of this scriptural exegesis Eriugena attempts to show that ‘pass away’ and ‘perish’ are synonymous. He also makes it clear that, according to revealed doctrine, the earth, like any material creature existing in space and time shall perish.<sup>71</sup> And he is careful to explain that, “passing away” is not reducible to spatial or temporal relocation; it means passing out of existence. He revisits a selection from his list of Aristotelian categories – Place, Time, Quality and Quantity – and makes it clear that the earth shall not pass from one visible form to another. It is of course significant that form is qualified with ‘visible’. He is taking care to avoid expressing the view that the *substance* of the earth shall perish or pass out of existence. That the substance of anything should pass out of existence is explicitly repudiated.

For among the things which derive their substances from the Cause of all things there is nothing which shall be reduced to nothing.<sup>72</sup>

How could it be, Eriugena asks, that the substance of any nature created by God should perish?

For everything that is created in man according to nature must of necessity remain eternally intact and uncorrupted. For it is not in accordance with Divine justice that anything should perish of that which He has made, especially as it is not nature herself who has sinned, but the perverse will which moves irrationally against rational nature.<sup>73</sup>

*Prima facie* these sentences look like a contradiction of the previous quoted passage in which Eriugena claimed that the world shall perish. And yet if we accept that it is only the qualitative and sensible that pass away, the two passages are actually in a clear alignment. That which is created in man according to nature is man’s substance, indeed it is the substance of all things since all of nature is created in man. Now, that

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<sup>71</sup> IV 802AB: *porro quia omne quod in hunc mundum per generationem localiter et temporaliter nascitur non potest fine carere, sive minimis (ut dies, horae, momenta), sive maximis (ut saecula), sive mediis (ut aetates, anni) temporum intervallis inter principium nativitatis in hanc vitam eiusdemque vitae finem interpositis, naturali creaturam ordinatione exigente – omne siquidem quod in mundo, ex mundo compositum, incipit esse, necesse est resolvi, et cum mundo interire.*

<sup>72</sup> V 1020B

<sup>73</sup> IV 760CD



which perishes, according to Eriugena's exegesis of "Heaven and earth shall pass away," are the visible forms and the categorial differences, differences of place and time and quality and so on. If this is correct then it must follow that these categorial differences, the visible forms of created substances are products of, "the perverse will which moves irrationally against rational nature." And this, I take it, accords with the conclusions of the previous chapter in which it was found that the sensible world would be no different from the intelligible paradise if it were not for the irrational and sinful movement of man's will. It was also found at the end of the last chapter that this penumbra of qualitative forms (that is, sensible body) is in a sense, a shadow, a phantasy, unreal. The truth is veiled from man's epistemic faculty by the presence of an illusion.<sup>74</sup>

So this 'passing away' or perishing, in fact the entire process of Return, can be understood to be a passage from the less real to the more real, a stripping away of phantasy to reveal the truly existent substantial core.<sup>75</sup>

For all things which vary according to place and time, and which are subject to the corporeal senses, should not themselves be regarded as truly substantial existents but as transitory images and verifications derived therefrom.<sup>76</sup>

### III : The Incarnation

The incarnation is the necessary and sufficient condition of the Return. Without the grace of the Redeemer there can be no return:

I now put forward the view that the general resurrection of the dead, of the wicked as well as of the good, could not be effected without the Grace of the Redeemer of the world: and that natural virtue is insufficient to achieve it: so that if God the Word had not been made flesh and had not made His dwelling

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<sup>74</sup> III 683D: *mentisque acie irrationabilibus passionibus infirmata et ex splendoribus perspicuae veritatis reperiens consuetisque corporalibus umbris contenta.*

<sup>75</sup> As part of his discussion of the nature of the bodies of angels as they are manifest to humankind, Eriugena claims at V 993D that their bodies are, *nec tamen phantastice, sed veraciter*, and this is in contrast to human bodies that are, *materialia, ex qualitatibus mundi huius elementorum composita possident corpora.*

<sup>76</sup> V 913D – 914A



with man and had not taken upon Him the whole of the our human nature, in which He Himself suffered and arose from the dead, there would be no resurrection for the dead at all.<sup>77</sup>

The Return of all things takes place solely through the agency of the Word made flesh. Eriugena makes it clear in this passage that Christ takes on or receives the whole of human nature. For Eriugena the *complete* humanity of Christ is essential. The incarnation is a unification of the divine and the human. In other words it is not a case of the divine substance assuming the human, like a suit of clothes or a disguise.

‘Since’, he [sc. Maximus the Confessor<sup>78</sup>] says, ‘like us He’, that is, Christ, ‘has body and sense and soul and intellect.’ For human nature is constituted of these as of four parts, and Christ, as true Man, took them upon Himself and unified them in Himself. For He was made perfect Man. For He left nothing of man, except sin, that He would not receive into the unity of His Substance and would not unify, that is, would not make one, in Himself.<sup>79</sup>

Also ruled out by this complete identification is the view that the incarnate Christ acts as an intermediary between God and man. Eriugena explicitly denies the possibility of Christ as intermediary; there is no intermediary between the Word and the causes of all things. The only candidates that Eriugena considers as possibly holding this position are the angels. But if the angels were to occupy this place, between the primordial causes and the Word, it would render them uncaused, or uncreated. And this is clearly not licit.

It is not to be believed that they [sc. angels] were made in such a way that their causes are not created in the Word. For there is no creature whose cause, made in the Word, does not precede it, and which is not substantiated by it so that it may be, nor ordered by it so that it may be beautiful, nor preserved by it so that it may be eternal, nor manifested either to the senses or intellects so that it

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<sup>77</sup> V 899AB: *nil aliud mihi occurrebat, praeter quod resurectio mortuorum generaliter bonorum malorumque non nisi sola Redemptoris mundi gratia futura sit, nulla naturali virtute cogente, in tantum ut si Deus Verbum caro factum non fieret, et inter homines conversatus non esset, et totam humanam naturam non reciperet, in qua passus est et resurrexit, nulla mortuorum resurrectio foret.* See also I 445C where Eriugena makes the claim that sin is a loss of being, and that man is restored to being, *unigeniti fillii dei gratia*.

<sup>78</sup> Eriugena’s christology is based squarely on that of Maximus. He begins his commentary on the *sententiam venerabilis Maximi* (I Ambigua xxxvii, PG 91 1304D – 1312A) at II 529C and closes the discussion at II 542C. See Marcia Colish, “John the Scot’s Christology and Soteriology in Relation to His Greek Sources” in *Downside Review*, 1982 pp. 138-51.

<sup>79</sup> II 541BC



may provide matter for praise of that one Cause from which and in which and through which and for which it was established.<sup>80</sup>

It follows from this that the incarnation is something like a cause becoming one with its effects. And indeed Eriugena gives the scriptural and theological account of the incarnation a metaphysical expression. He claims that God was Himself made man that He might save the effects of the Causes. In order to fulfil this salvific role,

God, in Whom and through Whom and for Whom according to His Divinity all things were made, descended according to His Humanity into the effects of the Causes.<sup>81</sup>

The effects are saved by being called back into their Causes, preserved in them just as the Causes are themselves preserved.

The mechanics of this process still need to be made clear. Christ's incarnation represents, or follows the course of, the tumbling of that simple eternal and perfect human nature into accidental diversity. This is the descent of the cause into its effects; the descent of the Word into the flesh is an index of the procession of genus into species. And it is in this humanity that Christ is resurrected. The resurrection consists in the conversion or transformation of His humanity into His divinity. But this conversion does not involve the loss of humanity. Eriugena is at pains to point out that this post-resurrection humanity, the Christ that appears to the disciples before His ascension, is a humanity that lacks sexual division, does not exist in place and

it is the same with time, with quality, with quantity, with circumscribed form. For it is most piously believed and most clearly understood that all these are absent from the whole Humanity of Christ, that is from His body, His soul, and His intellect, after the triumph of the resurrection; and to that same glory He shall after the general resurrection, bring His chosen <who> shall be one in Him and with Him.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> III 668D – III 669A

<sup>81</sup> V 912A

<sup>82</sup> II 539C: *eodem modo sane intellige de tempore de qualitate de quantitate de forma circumscripta. His enim omnibus tota Christi humanitas, hoc est corpus et anima et intellectus, carere piissime creditur purissimeque intelligitur post resurrectionis palmam, et ad eandem gloriam electos suos post catholicam resurrectionem ducturus <qui> unum in eo et cum eo futuri sunt.*



It is not the case, however, that Christ's resurrection body is different from His incarnate body. In fact, Eriugena explains, there is no difference between Christ's post-resurrection humanity, His incarnate humanity, and humanity in its pristine, created perfection. Christ's resurrected body, the body that was visible to the disciples, Eriugena argues is no different from the body that was born of the Virgin.

It was the same body, but from being mortal it had become immortal, from being animal it had become spiritual, and from being earthly it had become heavenly.<sup>83</sup>

This humanity of Christ, Eriugena argues, is perfected humanity:

The perfection of man is Christ, in Whom all is consummated.<sup>84</sup>

The 'becoming immortal', the 'becoming spiritual' do not mark changes in the substance of Christ's humanity, substance is not subject to change. Rather they are consummations, unifications. In His resurrection Christ reveals, through His own glory, the glory of humanity. The incarnation and the resurrection mark the twin poles of man's Fall and Resurrection, as well as the core Neoplatonic trope: the procession of the cause into effect, and the effect's subsistence in its cause. By revealing the true nature of humanity, Eriugena argues, Christ is the initiator of the Return.

It is as initiator of the Return through His death and resurrection that the incarnate Christ plays a key role in Eriugena's eschatology. Eriugena tells us that God descended into the nature of man in order to recall man to his former state, to heal the wounds of his transgressions and, "to sweep away the shadows of false phantasies, opening the eyes of the mind, showing Himself in all things to those who are worthy of such a vision."<sup>85</sup> The identification of 'false phantasies' with sensible body has already been made, both in this chapter and the last. It is as 'sweeper away' that Christ is the herald of the Return, or indeed the cause of the Return. It is through Christ that

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<sup>83</sup> V 994A

<sup>84</sup> IV 743B: *Vir autem perfectus est Christus, in quo omnia consummata sunt.*

<sup>85</sup> III 684A



those who are worthy come to recognise their fallen state, who have their minds opened. This opening of the mind is the dying to the world which has already been identified with contemplation or *theoria*. The orthodox interpretation of Christ's dying for us that we might be saved from death, is construed by Eriugena as a call to contemplation; the death from which Christ saves us, according to Eriugena, must be the death that is the beguiling of our sense faculties by the shadows of false phantasies. In other words, Christ saves us from the effects of the Fall, by initiating the Return. And that Return is conceived by Eriugena as a unification.

For in Him after His resurrection body and sense, soul and intellect are not four but one, and not a composite one, but simply one.<sup>86</sup>

This is an internal unification, a unifying of man's composite fallen nature. In bringing about this internal unification, however, Christ also effects a general unification since, "in man... the universal creature is created"<sup>87</sup> and in man all things shall return to God.

In conclusion, therefore, the incarnation, represents a voluntary act on the part of the Cause of all to descend into Its effects. And this action on God's part is a miraculous breaking of the rules whereby a cause is understood to stand radically prior to its effects.<sup>88</sup> Even when, by means of dialectic, a cause comes to be identified with its effects inasmuch as the effects are found to subsist within their cause, and the cause is wholly instantiated in each of its effects, the relation is not quite identity. Cicero is substantially Man, and vice versa, but to claim that the individual Cicero, QFs and all, is *absolutely* identical to Man would be to claim for Cicero all the attributes of the incarnate Christ. The incarnation represents the Cause's assuming a complete identity with the effects, and thereby revealing to mankind the possibility of

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<sup>86</sup> II 541C

<sup>87</sup> II 541D: *in homine... universa creatura condita est.*

<sup>88</sup> III 663C; V 913D



substantial resurrection. The reason for the incarnation, and the endpoint of unification coincide in the complete gathering together of undescended effects within their cause. This unification does not nullify difference, it preserves it.

#### IV : Summary

It has thus far been found that Eriugena offers a 'layered' definition of death, a definition that comprises a number of nuanced meanings. These nuances, while not strictly contradictory, do not make it possible to extract a single, coherent argument from the exchange between the Alumnus and Nutritor at this point in the dialogue. Rather we find the ascetic, paradoxical definition of death, as the death of death, or as the phantastical illusion of life, deployed in conjunction with the more straightforward definition of death as the perishing of the body.

Now that the first stage in the Return has been identified (albeit ambiguously) with the death *of* the body, and death *to* the body, it remains to be shown precisely what the Return consists in. According to both Models A and B there is clearly a certain sort of 'motion' that is being described. Eriugena is explicit in thinking that the Return is a *process* of simplification; it is a movement away from complexity and diversity, towards unity and similarity.

For since the nature of God, Who is a Spirit, is simple, so shall we also be when we are formed into the same Image.<sup>89</sup>

Let us now turn to an examination of the Return understood as a movement towards simplicity.

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<sup>89</sup> V 878CD. Eriugena authenticates his argument by reference to Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, VII, 194 (CCSL 14 p. 282): *sicut portavimus imaginem illius terreni, portemus et imaginem huius caelistis*. See also V 941D-942A; V 922AB.



Introduction:

‘Unification’, for Eriugena, is an eschatological term, it refers to the goal or end point of the entire Return.

When nothing more shall come into the world by generation or go back into it by decay, all things shall be at rest. For when the world passes away no part of it shall remain. And if no part of it shall remain, then the whole shall be done away. For it shall pass into the Causes whence it came, in which there is neither space nor time, but only the simple and uncompounded “reasons” of space and time, in which all things are one, and not distinguished by any accidents. For all things shall be simple, without composition of substance and accidents, and, if I may so express myself, there will be a simple unity consisting of a manifold unification (*multiplex adunatio*) of all creatures in their principles and causes, and of the principles and causes themselves in the Only-Begotten Word of God, in Whom all things have their being and subsistence.<sup>90</sup>

The Return, as conceived by Eriugena, is something like the closing of a telescope.

The complexity and diversity of creation is retracted into a state of immutable simplicity.

For we who are now composite shall be one, and shall be transformed into a single substance. For in the Resurrection there shall not be one part inferior to another, as in this life our weak and corruptible flesh is inferior, rendered by the condition of corporeal nature susceptible to wounds and injuries, and weighed down by material bulk from rising above the earth and walking on high; but in the resurrection we shall be formed into the beauty of a simple creature.<sup>91</sup>

This, however, is only one side of the story for Eriugena who wishes (presumably partly as a result of certain doctrinal obligations) to retain the view that the whole human person – that is body and soul – will be resurrected and will ultimately be ‘unified’ with the Divine Wisdom. Without this there can be no concept of individual human salvation. There is clearly a tension, therefore, between the desire to tidy up the Return into a single simple *telos*, and the need to explain the abiding presence of

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<sup>90</sup> V 906AB

<sup>91</sup> V 878C



individual substances. An examination of whether or not Eriugena is able successfully to square these two positions (and if he does so, how he does so) will occupy the majority of this section.

### **I : Unification**

The sensible body consists in the addition to the single created nature, or substance, of an exterior body. This body, as was discussed in Chapter One is made up of QFs and matter or rather, QFs investing a quantum produce visible matter or body. But,

since God is simple, and we are made in the image of God, when we return to our original creation in the image, we too must be simple.<sup>92</sup>

The difficulty in squaring these two positions – the complexity of the body, with the simplicity of the created nature – lies in the claim that the process of unification does not involve any confusion of individual substances. Eriugena insists that it is

“repugnant to reason” (*rationi resistens*) to suppose that

intelligible substances should come together so as to be one, and yet each not cease to retain its own subsistence and property.<sup>93</sup>

The claim is, therefore, that in this process of unification there is no reduction in the number of individual substances. *Prima facie* this looks contradictory. After all what can ‘unification’ mean if not a becoming-one? But Eriugena insists that the substances are not dissolved into one solution. Indeed since the substance of each and any thing is the reason whereby that thing subsists in the eternal causes which in turn subsist in the Word of God, it must follow, Eriugena argues, that the substance knows, “neither

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<sup>92</sup> V 941D-942A; see also V 922AB; V 878CD.

<sup>93</sup> V 879A: *intelligibiles substantiae sibi invicem adunari, ut et unum sint, et unaquaeque proprietatem suam et subsistentiam habere desistat.*



transience nor death.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, the substances do not cease to exist, rather they are preserved in the higher substance; they subsist *in* it and are one *with* it. And Eriugena offers a number of examples by way of illustration. Firstly, he points out to the Alumnus that in every substance there are three things that can never change or be removed – essence, potency and act. None of these can exist without the others because all belong to one and the same substance. They are unified within the substance, abiding necessarily and eternally as part of the substantial nature.<sup>95</sup>

Eriugena offers further examples. In one species, he claims, there are many individuals. And likewise, in one genus, there are many species. In one essence there are many genera. But, Eriugena continues,

each genus preserves its proper principles distinguished from those of another, not confused nor mixed nor compounded together, but unified so as to form, as one might say, a certain (*quoddam*) one which is both multiple and simple.<sup>96</sup>

The qualificatory *ut ita dicam* and *quoddam* are important; they indicate the mysterious, indefinable nature of this relationship between higher and lower orders that are compounded *somehow* in a complex unity. This is a special sort of unification, therefore, not a strict becoming-one, but an identification with that which is higher. So an individual is stripped of its accidents and becomes identical to its species; likewise the species becomes identical to the genus in which it subsists, and so on.

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<sup>94</sup> V 884B. For the substance of a thing being its subsistence in the divine cause see IV 772B: *datur intelligi nullius creaturae aliam subsistentiam esse, praeter illam rationem, secundum quam in primordialibus causis in dei verbo substituta est*. See also II 616B: *principia omnium dicuntur esse quoniam omnia quaecumque in creatura sive visibile sive invisibile sentiuntur vel intelliguntur eorum participatione subsistunt, ipsa vero unius universorum causae, summae videlicet ac sanctae trinitatis participationes sunt*.

<sup>95</sup> See also I 486BC: *in omni rationabili intellectualique natura tria inseparabilia semperque incorruptibiliter manentia considerantur, οὐσίαν dico et δύναμιν, ἐνέργειανque, hoc est essentiam virtutem operationem*.

<sup>96</sup> V 881C: *in una οὐσίᾳ unumquodque genus suas proprias rationes possideat, alterius generis rationibus discretas, neque confusas, neque mixtas, neque compositas, adunatas tamen, atque, ut ita dicam, unum quoddam multiplex et simplex*.



So the sound intellect must hold that after the end of this world every nature, whether corporeal or incorporeal, will seem (*videbitur*) to be only God, while preserving the integrity of its nature, so that even God, Who in Himself is incomprehensible, is after a certain mode (*quodam modo*) comprehended in the creature, while the creature itself by an ineffable miracle (*ineffabili miraculo*) is changed into God.<sup>97</sup>

Here we find that the identity relation is only ‘seeming’. In fact the integrity of the substantial nature is retained, indeed preserved. But the hesitant language reveals the speculative nature of the enquiry at this point; thus God is comprehended “after a certain mode” (*quodam modo*) in this eschatological reality, and the creature is changed by “an ineffable miracle” (*ineffabili miraculo*). Clearly the manner or mode in which an individual is unified with its species and yet retains its individuality cannot be given rational expression. It can only be expressed as a paradox: all things are one, and yet not one.<sup>98</sup> We are now running up against what is perhaps the most rebarbative and paradoxical element of Eriugena’s metaphysics. In the middle of the *Tractatio de Nihilo* in Book III the Nutritor makes the claim that since God both makes all things and is made in all things, it is reasonable to conclude that, “all things that are are not inappropriately said to be both eternal together (*simul*) and made.”<sup>99</sup> They are eternal inasmuch as their causes subsist eternally in God’s Wisdom; they are made inasmuch as they proceed from the Wisdom. The Alumnus is understandably shocked: “I am indeed bewildered and struck dumb as a dead man with stupefaction.”<sup>100</sup> And although he finds his master’s arguments forceful, he is, “rapidly overwhelmed by the thick clouds,” of his thoughts.<sup>101</sup> The Alumnus attempts to engage with the difficulties. First on his list of queries is death. It seems to him obvious that things are not eternal since they clearly die. That which receives a

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<sup>97</sup> I 451B

<sup>98</sup> V 983B: *omnes simul sunt, et simul non sunt*.

<sup>99</sup> III 646C: *omnia igitur quae sunt et aeterna simul et facta non incongrue dicituntur*. See also V 907D-908A.

<sup>100</sup> III 646C: *Valde miror ac stupefactus veluti exanimis haereo*.

<sup>101</sup> III 646D: *mox in tenebras densissimas cogitationum mearum relabor*.



beginning of its being will necessarily receive an end. The Alumnus believes that the end will be an end of its essence.<sup>102</sup> And herein lies his mistake. The Nutritor is gentle with his pupil; he admits that in the past, he too was, “deceived by the false reasonings of human opinions that are far from the truth.”<sup>103</sup> But the Nutritor’s position is expressed clearly later:

The essence... of sensible things... will, as true reason faithfully teaches, abide forever, for it is created unalterably in the Divine Wisdom beyond all space and time and change.<sup>104</sup>

There could not be an end to that which is eternal. But then what is to be made of the truth – revealed in Scripture – that all things shall perish? Once again the argument is thrown back against the Alumnus’s original question: what does it mean to say that something perishes, if that same something continues to subsist in its cause for eternity?

In answer, the Nutritor offers an extended arithmetical illustration to show how something can be both eternal and made.

For [the numbers] are in [the monad] causally because it subsists as the beginning of all numbers, and in it all are one and simply indivisible, that is, in a universal and multiple mode, in the reason only, but not in act and operation; nor is the one an aggregate of many, but one deriving from its singularity (which is) both simple and multiple, so that all numbers are in it all at once and simple, as in their cause, and it itself is understood to be in them all multiplied by an ineffable distribution, as their substance.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> III 647D: *Nam quoniam principium essendi accepit essentiae suae terminum inevitabiliter accepturus est.*

<sup>103</sup> III 649D

<sup>104</sup> V 867B: *essentiam itaque rerum sensibilium...perpetualiter permansuram esse vera ratio fiducialiter astruit, quoniam in divina sapientia incommutabiliter ultra omnia loca et tempora omnemque mutabilitatem facta est.*

<sup>105</sup> III 652BC: *in ea enim causaliter sunt quia omnium numerorum subsistit principium et ibi omnes unum sunt individuum simpliciter, hoc est universaliter et multipliciter sola ratione, non autem actu et opere, neque unum ex multis cumulatum sed unum sua et simplici et multiplici singularitate praeditum ita ut et omnes numeri in ea sint simul et simpliciter secundum causam et ipsa in omnibus multipliciter ineffabili distributione intelligatur secundum substantiam.*



Of interest here is the assertion that the numbers subsist in the monad as, “one and simply indivisible, that is, in a universal and multiple mode.”<sup>106</sup> It follows that the monad is singular in an unusual way; since it contains all numbers, is indeed the substance of all numbers, it is, “both simple and multiple.” Likewise, the primordial causes are plural only in

the aspects, that is, in the concept of the mind which investigates them and which conceives in itself such knowledge of them as is permitted and arranges that knowledge methodically.<sup>107</sup>

Whereas in fact, “these first causes are one and simple.” The complexity lies in the investigating mind, not in the substantial reality. Underlying this notion of complexity, is the view that identity does not entail singularity. In other words it is possible to differ in number and yet be identical.<sup>108</sup>

It is the notion of numerically complex identity that allows for the possibility of unification. In the passage quoted at the head of this section Eriugena claimed that the end point of the Return shall be, “a manifold unification of all creatures in their principles and causes.”<sup>109</sup>

The key to understanding Eriugena’s peculiar notion of singularity or simplicity, is substance, or the essence that eternally subsists. The monad is the substance of numbers. And in the same way the species is the specific substance of the individual. Let us return briefly to the discussion of the first chapter concerning form.

Of the forms, some are understood in οὐσίᾳ, others in quality; but those which are in οὐσίᾳ are the substantial species of the genus. For of them genus is predicated because it subsists in them. For the genus, as we have

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. I 492C: *ratio siquidem omnium numerorum in unitate inconcussa est nec augeri potest nec minui.*

<sup>107</sup> III 624A

<sup>108</sup> See Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 160 where a useful comparison is made between Eriugena’s understanding of Identity with that of the German Idealists, and Heidegger in particular.

<sup>109</sup> V 906B



often said, is whole in each of its forms, just as also the several forms are one in their genus; and all these, that is, genera and forms, flow from the single source of οὐσία and by a natural circulation return to it again.<sup>110</sup>

Here is the identification of the forms within *Ousia* with species. We labelled these forms ‘specific substances’ and, following Eriugena, we identified them with species such as ‘Man’ and ‘Horse’ and so on. The other forms, the forms of Quality, however, are, “dispersed among the diverse differences by accident.”<sup>111</sup> They are understood, “about substance but are not substance itself.”<sup>112</sup> It follows, according to Eriugena, that substantial human nature is, “one and the same in all whom it exists, and is always most like itself and admits of no variety.”<sup>113</sup> To be dialectically balanced with this is the mysterious retention by substance of the ‘impression.’ The impression is the permanent relation that obtains between the substantial interior body and the qualitative exterior body. It is this relation that allows for individuation even after unification. To use again the telescope analogy, whether it is extended or retracted, the telescope itself suffers no substantial loss. Likewise, in the Creation and Resurrection, in the procession and return, *natura* suffers no substantial loss or gain.

The radical simplicity of the *telos* even requires Eriugena to assert that the devil himself will be absorbed into the final End. It must be so because, “where all things are one there will be no more diversity.”<sup>114</sup>

Unification is, therefore, nothing more than the passing of the qualitative forms, the accidents, into their principles and causes. Or, in doctrinal terms, it is the undoing of the effects of the Fall. What is left after this purging process is the substance or species. A denial of diversity does not imply absolute identity.

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<sup>110</sup> I 494AB

<sup>111</sup> III 703B

<sup>112</sup> III 703C

<sup>113</sup> III 703BC; Cf. IV 801A where Eriugena quotes Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, 28 (PG 44 230A): *mutatur enim per auctionem et diminutionem corpus, veluti vestimenta quaedam, consequentes aetates indutum. Stat vero per omnem conversionem intransmutabilis in seipsa forma.*

<sup>114</sup> V 930BC



To what extent is it possible for Eriugena to retain the individuality of the individual substance and yet argue that that substance just is the species? The answer is unclear. On the one hand he admits that, “in the Resurrection... human nature will be made one.”<sup>115</sup> And this is demonstrable, according to Eriugena, by reference to the fact that human nature was made in the Image of God. How can that which is made in the Image be composite or multiple?

If human nature is in the image and likeness of God, the whole Image is in it as a whole, and in each individual which participates in it, and admits neither in itself nor in another any division or partition or possibility of division or partition, whether in potency or act, of its uniform simplicity. For if the Divinity in Whose Image humanity was created is one and indivisible, it must follow that the latter also is one and indivisible, and that all men without exception are in it One.<sup>116</sup>

But on the other hand Eriugena insists that, “this wonderful and ineffable unification does not involve the confusion of the individual essences and substances.”<sup>117</sup> That which allows for the possibility of a manifold unity, a complex simplicity is the relation of mutual dependency that obtains between a genus and the species that fall under it.

For as, when a genus perishes, everyone of its species must perish, so when the species perish reason requires (*ratio cogit*) that their genus must perish. For the genus is preserved in its species and the species in their genus.<sup>118</sup>

It follows from the above that for the genus to be one – indeed for the genus to be at all – it must contain a number of species.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, this relation must be entirely static, that is unchanging; in regard to its species, the genus can suffer no loss or gain. These claims are made by the Nutritor as part of a discussion concerning the genus

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<sup>115</sup> V 893C

<sup>116</sup> V 922BC

<sup>117</sup> V 894A

<sup>118</sup> III 737B. Just as genus and species are mutually dependent, so too are causes and effects: see V 912B: *pereuntibus enim causarum effectibus nulla causa remaneret, sicut pereuntibus causis nulli remanerent effectus*.

<sup>119</sup> That the genus must contain more than one species is explained at III 737D: *si una species sola permanserit caeteris intereuntibus, peribit etiam genus, quod nequaquam in una specie stabit. Quemadmodum enim una species ullum genus efficit non video*



Animal and the status of irrational souls. Since man belongs in the genus Animal, and since man, after the dissolution of the body, survives, how can it be that other species of the genus Animal do not survive? After all, living and dying do not express special differences within one genus, rather they are absolutely contradictory:

If then, after the dissolution of the body one species survives [viz man] while the other perishes [viz irrational animals], how will their genus preserve its integrity?<sup>120</sup>

But for Eriugena the genus Animal (which includes all things that consist of body and soul) does, as a matter of fact, retain its integrity, it must be case, therefore, that all its species are preserved intact. Irrational souls are to be included within the general resurrection.

The same genus / species relation as that between Animal and Man, holds between Man and the individual essences and substances, that is, between the specific substance and the individual substances that comprise the species. Therefore, just as the relationship of mutual dependency between Animal and its species is static, even in some sense necessary, so the relationship between Man and its instantiations is also characterised by mutual dependency, static and bound by some form of necessity.

In this way it seems that the, “lack of confusion” between manifold individual substances within a simple species, or to put it another way, between diverse effects subsisting within a single cause, is a logical prerequisite of Eriugena’s metaphysics.

No Cause could survive the destruction of the effects of the Causes, any more than the effects could survive the destruction of their Causes. For because Cause and effect are relative terms, they come into being together, they pass away together, or together they endure forever.<sup>121</sup>

This claim has some interesting – and *prima facie* unpalatable – entailments.

Unpalatable to Eriugena, that is. It surely follows from the above statement that the descent of the Cause into its effects is logically necessary. If there is a Cause, there

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<sup>120</sup> III 737B

<sup>121</sup> V 912B



must be effects. And vice versa. But where in this picture is there room for God's grace, for man's irrational will as precipitating the Fall, for the possibility of redemption? Indeed, for Eriugena, as has been seen, the Incarnation is to be understood as the Cause of all things allowing Itself to descend into the effects. Eriugena believes that the relation between cause and effect undergoes no substantial alteration through procession and return. But this is not to deny the possibility of non-substantial alteration. And God's grace and man's irrational will both bring about non-substantial change. In the second case the change is qualitative, accidental, sub-substantial; in the case of God's grace, the change is super-substantial, or supernatural (see stage 7 on Model B). After all, God's grace is described by Eriugena as, "*donum*";<sup>122</sup> it is a gift, an addition, given voluntarily. Likewise, man's irrational will falls outside of the causal framework of Eriugena's metaphysics. Man's turning away from God is a turning towards nothingness, it is a negative action, unaccounted for, indeed unaccountable within *natura*.

Here again is the proximity of Paradise and the material, sensible world, or rather their identity. Since cause and effect, genus and species are mutually entailed, it follows that there can ultimately be no substantial difference between God (cause) and His creation (effect). The difference is non-substantial, even illusory, and is explicable by means of the Fall: man's wilfull turning away from reality.

In order to illustrate his understanding of unification that has as its end a 'manifold unity' or a complex simplicity, Eriugena offers a number of examples from the sensible realm. Air and light are different, but air does not lose its substance when, "it is wholly converted into the light of the sun." He also uses the Dionysian example of candles in a church. The light that they give is single

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<sup>122</sup> V 905A. According to Eriugena, *donum gratiae neque intra terminos conditae naturae continetur, neque secundam naturalem virtutem operatur, sed superessentialiter et ultra omnes creatas naturales rationes effectus suos peragit* (V 904B).



and yet it is most certain that the lights of the many lamps are by no means confused, though formed into one light. For if someone were to remove one of the lamps from the building in which they are burning, and carry it, still alight, into another place, it will leave behind it no trace of its own light in the brightness of the other lamps, nor take any of theirs with it.<sup>123</sup>

The example of voices in a choir is also given.

It follows that unification is not strictly a process at all. The species subsist immutably within their genera; and the individuals stand in the same relation with the species.

In It (viz the Divine Nature) all will be One, just as even now in their causes [viz sensible and intelligible species] they are One and always are so.<sup>124</sup>

But note that although all things subsist as a unity in their causes, the causes themselves *will* be One in the Divine Nature. The use of the future tense seems to allow for some temporal movement. This possibility is denied, however, by the claim that the Return is not a return of substances, but rather of qualities and quantities and other accidents.<sup>125</sup>

This static, non-process understanding of the Return, complements the findings of the previous chapter in which it was claimed that the doctrine of the Fall, as Eriugena explains it, is ahistorical. Of course the two notions of procession and return, Fall and Resurrection, are complementary. But I am suggesting here that they are complementary in a way that is not immediately obvious, or adequately recognised in the scholarship. The Fall and the Return are, according to this way of thinking, modes of understanding the unchanging nature of the relationship that obtains between God and His creation.

Just as the deified shall ascend through an innumerable number of stages of divine contemplation... so those who are separated from God shall ever descend through the different degrees of their vices into the depths of

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<sup>123</sup> V 883C; Cf Pseudo-Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* II, 4 (PG3 641AB). For Eriugena's translation of this passage see PL 122 1121D – 1122A.

<sup>124</sup> IV 860C: *in ipsa [divina videlicet natura] unum erunt, sicut nunc et semper in causis unum sunt.*

<sup>125</sup> V 885C



ignorance and into the outer darkness, where, “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mat. 8:12)<sup>126</sup>

In this passage the process of Fall and Return are precisely twinned. Or rather human nature must choose to place itself upon a spectrum expressed in terms of procession and return, descent and ascent. On the basis of our earlier conclusions, this ‘moment’ of choice can be termed a ‘dying’ moment; it is either death to the sensible world, in which case the movement on the spectrum is up, and is to be understood as Return; or it is, “the death of folly and ignorance”<sup>127</sup> and corresponds to the Fall. In this sense Fall and Return play a salvific role. Or rather, they explain certain constant relations that obtain between Creator and creation, constant relations that, when understood correctly, will lead us back into a correct alignment with the Divine Providence, an alignment which is itself understood as contemplation or *theoria*. The means whereby we ascend, and the (unreachable) goal of the ascent are identical: divine contemplation. These relations are metaphorically *correspondent to* procession (Fall) and Return (general resurrection) but the relations are not temporally locatable events. After all, how could they have any spatio-temporal relations, since the relation between Creator and creation is effect eternally subsisting in its cause, as Creator manifesting Himself in creation? As with the Fall, there may be conceptual room for the Return, but there is no temporal or spatial distance between Creator and creation, so ‘emanation’ language can only have a metaphorical meaning.<sup>128</sup> No substantial transformation takes place; the substance remains unaltered.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> V 945D - 946A: *quemadmodum deificati per innumerabiles divinae contemplationis gradus ascendent, ita a Deo elongati semper descendunt per diversos vitiorum suorum descensus in profundum ignorantiae, inque tenebras exteriores, in quibus erit fletus et stridor dentium.*

<sup>127</sup> V 910C: *insipientiae et ignorantiae interitu.*

<sup>128</sup> Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1978) pp. 17-26.

<sup>129</sup> V 884A: *substantia ipsius, corporis dico, semper incommutabiliter absque ulla transmutatione permansura sit.*



If this is a correct reading of Eriugena, however, in what way are we to explain the references to change and transformation in Models A and B? For example in Model A, proposition 3) expresses the claim that body is transformed into soul. And the whole of Model B is articulated entirely through language of ‘transformation’. The solution may again lie in Eriugena’s notion of an effect continuing to subsist in its cause, and always willing to return to that cause.<sup>130</sup> With this in view, the mysterious change could be defined as the absorption of the effect into the cause, of the species into the genus. Thus, when the Nutritor reiterates his view that after the Resurrection there shall be neither male nor female, the Alumnus understands his teacher as saying

there will be neither male nor female in the future life, for the simplicity of our nature, alone surviving, shall have swallowed up into itself the double nature of sex which now is.<sup>131</sup>

Presumably this is the change that Eriugena has in mind. Turning back to Model B it is now possible to see that the transformations that take place are more accurately ‘absorptions’, or microcosmic returns within the global Return of all things. Thus, once the first four stages of the Model B return are complete, that is when the reason is transformed into mind, which is, “the end of every rational creature”<sup>132</sup> there is, as it were, a *caesura*. This *caesura* marks the point in the Return at which human nature has reached its created perfection before the ascent of that nature firstly into the knowledge of all things which come after God, then from that knowledge into wisdom, and finally to be merged with God Himself. The *caesura* itself is interesting:

Then this fivefold unification of the parts of our nature, in which body, vital motion, sensation and reason and mind are no longer five but one, in each case

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<sup>130</sup> III 639C; Cf. III 663C; III 687C; III 737C; V 909C-910A; V 944CD.

<sup>131</sup> V 896B: *simplicitas naturae duplicem, qui nunc est, sexum in seipsam absorpserit.*

<sup>132</sup> V 1020C



the lower nature becoming absorbed in the higher not so as to lose its existence but to become one with that higher nature.<sup>133</sup>

It is interesting that the fourfold ascent of human nature into mind, and then the three fold ascent of perfect human nature towards a merging with God are described as processes of transformation, whereas within the *caesura* Eriugena conceives the process as absorption, of telescoping the lower natures into the higher.

Higher natures always attract [*attrahunt*] lower natures to themselves.<sup>134</sup>

And this attraction is the motor of the Return. It is also the means whereby the four divisions of *natura* can be resolved. God is both Beginning inasmuch as He is the principle of all things; all things proceed from God into genera and species and individuals. But He is also the End of all things because

it is to the same Cause that all things that proceed from it shall return when they reach their end, it is therefore called the end of all things and is said neither to create nor be created.<sup>135</sup>

And, Eriugena argues, the same process is to be found in created nature:

Causes are separated from the effects and the effects are united to the causes because they make one with them in a single genus.<sup>136</sup>

And the similarity between God's relation to creation, and between cause and effect, is not accidental. God stands to creation in the same relation as cause stands to effect. It follows, therefore, that the creature must return to God.

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<sup>133</sup> V 1020CD: *post hanc quinarium veluti partium nostrae naturae adunationem, corporis videlicet, et vitalis notus, sensusque, rationisque, intellectusque, ita ut non quinque, sed unum sint, inferioribus semper a superioribus consummatis.*

<sup>134</sup> V 901AB

<sup>135</sup> II 526D

<sup>136</sup> II 528A



## Conclusion

Having settled upon a definition of body and material substance in the first half of this study, we proceeded in the second half to test that definition in the theological and evaluative context of Books IV and V of the *Periphyseon*.

In the light of our findings, it is now possible to conclude that Eriugena's attitude to body and material substance is profoundly ascetical. In the introduction to Chapter Four of this study the claim was made that Eriugena's understanding of the Return of all things to God is informed by a Pauline sensibility, and a number of Pauline references were discussed. It is possible, however, that to Eriugena the most important of all Paul's statements is the claim at Romans 1:20 that

ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made.<sup>1</sup>

Eriugena does not read Paul's text as a basis for an argument for the beauty and perfection of the created world (although the perfection of God's creation is, of course, affirmed in the *Periphyseon*) rather he uses the verse as an authority for the development of an ascetical attitude to created nature.

The changes – birth and dissolution – to which the flesh is heir are themselves beautiful and have no cause but the disposition of Divine Providence. Indeed, they are

the spiritual medicine by which God willed to recall His Image to itself and into Himself that, wearied by its experience of the tedium of mutable things, it should long to contemplate the stability of immutable and eternal things, and ardently seek for the everlasting forms of true things, in the beauty of which it may find its rest, all variety being done away with.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas.* (Vulg.)

<sup>2</sup> V 959B



The real beauty of the material world consists precisely in those aspects that would generally be thought ugly or undesirable – mutability, dissolution, destruction; they are beautiful because they act as a medicine, a corrective. Material beauty is the opposite: dangerous, beguiling, false. Variety is to be avoided, shunned, simplicity sought.

The message of the passage quoted above, is unequivocally a message of withdrawal from the world. But this withdrawal is not conceived by Eriugena as a negative exercise; in order effectively to withdraw from the world in the way that Eriugena intends, the intellect must be positively engaged in correctly aligning itself with substantial reality. This correct alignment Eriugena describes as contemplation.

i) *Contemplatio*:

Moran makes the claim that, “Eriugena’s concept of philosophy is as a contemplation of the created world which changes the fantasies of this world into divine theophanies.”<sup>3</sup> This is close to our conclusions here. It should be made clear, however, that the change takes place in the perceiving mind. The contemplation can make no substantial change to reality. How could it? Nature is substantially immutable. Rather, contemplation is a recognition of nature as theophany, a recognition of unchanging truth. Thus the return of all things to God, conceived by Eriugena as a function of contemplation, is not a change or transformation in the nature of reality. Just as the Fall is to be understood ahistorically, so too is the Return. The difference between the physical world and Paradise that we identified at the end of Chapter Three, is a reflection of man’s fallen point of view. Man is divided from

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<sup>3</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 132



the Creator according to his deserts. But likewise man is capable of unification with the Creator according to his merits.

Abraham rejoiced in eternal peace, while the rich man groaned in inextinguishable fire. That is why the rich man saw Abraham as one that was afar off... This is the great distance and the unbridgeable gulf which divides the punishments from the rewards. For from the fact that the rich man could speak to Abraham as though he were close to him instead of far away you may understand that he was not separated from Abraham by his nature, but by his guilt.<sup>4</sup>

In the language of the first part of this study, the gulf between the rich man and Abraham is not substantial, but qualitative. In the language of the second part, the gulf marks the difference between the Fall and the Return. And in conclusion we suggest that the gulf, though expressible in metaphysical terms, is ultimately moral.

For Eriugena, our moral stance in relation to any given object dictates the qualitative or sensible nature of that object. For the object to appear as an agglomeration of qualitative or sensible effects is to express the Fall. For the object to appear in its substantial simplicity, is to express the Return. And this latter expression is a function of the act of contemplation, an act that we identified above with a recognition of creation as theophany.

Dialectics, for Eriugena, is not a school exercise, nor is it merely a tool to be deployed in the service of theological investigation, it is the very essence of contemplation. So it is in *contemplatio* that the reversion of effect into cause is ultimately to be realised. In his hexaemeral exegesis Eriugena identifies contemplation with the Tree of Life.<sup>5</sup> The Tree is, in turn, identified with Christ, the perfection of human nature. Contemplation is therefore the perfection of human nature. *Contemplatio*, or human perfection, consists in the turning of the intellectual

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<sup>4</sup> V 983C. At V 984A Eriugena makes the same point in a non-exegetical passage: although *omnes homines unius eiusdemque naturae... vero qualitates et quantitates, hoc est bonorum actuum malorumque differentias... longe a se invicem et multipliciter et in infinitum disparari.*

<sup>5</sup> IV 844B



faculty towards the eternal substance and therefore away from the mutable and accidental materiality, towards being and away from non-being. It is unmistakably a call to ascesis.

Show Thyself to those who seek for nothing but Thee; shatter the clouds of empty phantasies which prevent the glance of the mind from beholding Thee in the way in which Thou grantest Thine invisible self to be seen by those who desire to look upon Thy face, their resting place, their end.<sup>6</sup>

The means whereby the phantasies are shattered and truth revealed is, for Eriugena, a realigning of the will and the epistemic faculty away from the sensible world and towards contemplation of the Divine truth.

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<sup>6</sup> III 650B



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